

An Afrocentric exploration of the Western Knowledge Systems over the African Indigenous Knowledge Systems: The Case Study of the African community in Edendale

By

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Abstract

This study examines the historical and ongoing influence of Western Knowledge Systems (WKS) on African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in Edendale, a peri-urban community in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. While Edendale's land was collectively purchased in 1851 by African Christian converts (*amakholwa*) under missionary guidance, this research demonstrates that Edendale's enduring epistemic resilience derives not from these settlers, whose prior missionary enculturation had already ruptured direct intergenerational transmission of precolonial knowledge, but from Indigenous inhabitants whose families occupied the Msunduzi valley before colonial settlement and who moved to Edendale subsequently, maintaining AIKS continuity alongside mission control through oral transmission, ritual practice, and communal memory. Framed within an Afrocentric paradigm, the research employs an exploratory case study design that combines archival analysis with participatory methods, including oral history interviews, a transect walk, and a River of Life workshop, with ten knowledge holders from Edendale, all rooted in these Indigenous lineages.The study introduces the Learning–Unlearning–Relearning Analytical Model as an Afrocentric learning theory to interpret how communities navigate epistemic disruption. Findings reveal that Edendale was a site of precolonial African sovereignty, later reshaped but never erased by colonial education and land dispossession. Despite socio-cultural fragmentation and internalised epistemic alienation, AIKS persist through adaptive re-centring of African cosmologies rather than cultural purity. Crucially, the research distinguishes between agency within rupture (the *amakholwa*'s constrained negotiation within already-transformed frameworks) and continuity despite displacement (Indigenous inhabitants' preservation of precolonial epistemic traditions).

The study contributes theoretically by advancing the Learning–Unlearning–Relearning triad as an Afrocentric framework for analysing epistemic transformation. tracing temporal transformation across these simultaneously operating dimensions, avoiding the category error of conflating spatial layers with temporal sequence.

Declaration

I, Ojochogwu Joy Obaje, declare that.

(i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.

(ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

(iii) This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

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Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of my father, Mr Valentine Abimaje

My roots, my compass, my silent fire.

You taught me that true knowledge

does not rise to leave the earth,

but grows deep to lift others.

This doctorate is your harvest.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIKS:	African Indigenous Knowledge Systems
AIM:	African Indigenous Medicine
DISA:	Digital Innovation South Africa
EHP:	Edendale History Project
IDP:	Integrated Development Plan
IK:	Indigenous Knowledge
IKS:	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
RoL:	River of Life
UKZN:	University of KwaZulu-Natal
WKS:	Western Knowledge Systems
YMCA:	Young Men's Christian Association

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Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The dominance of Western knowledge systems remains a defining feature of contemporary education and social thought across Africa. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) characterises this as the colonial alienation of the African mind, whereby language, education, and culture became instruments of epistemic control. Although Western epistemological traditions are internally diverse, this study examines the forms of Western knowledge institutionalised through colonialism as a hegemonic epistemic order. Through education, religion, governance, and science, colonialism deployed Western knowledge as a universal standard of objectivity and rationality, a process conceptualised by decolonial scholars as the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011). Drawing on this perspective, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) argues that the coloniality of knowledge continues to privilege Western epistemologies while marginalising alternative ways of knowing.

In contrast, the use of the plural term African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) reflects the diversity of African epistemologies, which are rooted in distinct histories, languages, cultures, and ecological contexts rather than a single homogeneous tradition. While these knowledge systems share relational ontological foundations, they remain locally situated and culturally specific. Consequently, AIKS have been systematically marginalised and dismissed as inferior, producing what Nyoni (2019) describes as a "colonial caged mentality" that constrains African intellectual autonomy. As Cabral (1974, p. 14) observed, colonisers not only create a system to repress the cultural life of the colonised but also provoke their cultural alienation, or the creation of a social gap between indigenous elites and the popular masses. However, while Western knowledge has historically been positioned as dominant, often marginalising or silencing Indigenous ways of knowing deeply rooted in cultural practices, oral histories, and communal lived experiences, this epistemic imposition has never been complete.

In the context of South Africa, this logic became embedded in missionary and colonial education systems, which structured African learning within Western theological and civilizational frameworks (Dubow, 2000; Meintjes, 2020). Looking at the Natal colony in the 19th Century, Swartz (2015) argues that the first settlement (Port Natal) was established by

the colonists to control Africans. They introduced Western education, which influenced the indigenous communities. Swartz (2015) further points out that the colonial government, using "rhetoric, civilisation and Christian conversion" (p. 11), validated their intrusion into indigenous people's lives. It is within this historical context of colonial justification and epistemic intrusion that this study seeks to investigate the impact of Western knowledge systems on AIKS in the Edendale community.

Edendale, a historically significant African community in KwaZulu-Natal, provides a valuable case study for such an exploration. Established in 1851, when approximately one hundred black Christian families settled on the *Welverdiend* farm under the guidance of missionary James Allison, the community reflects the entanglement of Western and African worldviews (Etherington, 2012). These original settlers were African Christian converts already shaped by missionary epistemologies rather than culturally intact Indigenous communities. The land they settled – land which had been granted by the British crown to Voortrekker leader Andries Petorius after British annexation of Natal - had been cleared of its original inhabitants by Pretorius. Consequently, the Indigenous knowledge examined in this study does not derive from the settlers' descendants, most of whom had left Edendale by the mid-1990s, but from knowledge holders descended from Indigenous populations of the wider Pietermaritzburg region who occupied land in the twentieth century.

While Western education, religion, and land tenure practices are known to have reshaped many aspects of African community life, the extent to which Indigenous knowledge persisted, whether through overt cultural practices or more subtle communal values and beliefs, remains a key question this study seeks to explore. The possibility that such knowledge may have functioned as a form of intergenerational cultural memory and embedded epistemic continuities,, quietly sustaining African worldviews despite colonial disruption, forms part of the inquiry guiding this research. According to Epprecht (2017), Indigenous knowledge in Edendale has endured in fragmented, adapted, and hybrid forms, continuing to shape everyday practices, identity, and community relations. Epprecht (2017) observes that Edendale has demonstrated enduring intellectual and cultural agency, continually negotiated its identity, and resisted epistemic erasure amid shifting colonial and postcolonial pressures. Despite this resilience, scholarly attention on Edendale's Indigenous knowledge systems and their interaction with Western knowledge remains limited.

This study helps address that gap. Framed within an Afrocentric paradigm, the study centres African voices, perspectives, and epistemologies to investigate how Western knowledge

systems have suppressed, influenced, or reshaped Indigenous knowledge in Edendale. Afrocentricity provides a lens through which African people are repositioned as subjects rather than objects of research, recognising their agency, resistance, and capacity to generate knowledge. The study also employs the concepts of learning, unlearning, and relearning, as used within Afrocentric theory, as interpretive frameworks to examine how communities navigate epistemic tensions and potentially reclaim Indigenous knowledge practices.

This chapter begins by outlining the study's background and context, thereafter clarifying its focus and purpose. It then highlights the significance of the study, including its contribution to scholarship, practice, and the Edendale community. The theoretical and conceptual framework guiding the study is introduced, followed by the research objectives and key research questions. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the thesis's structure, illustrating how each chapter contributes to addressing the central research problem.

1.2 Background and Context of the Study

The subjugation of African knowledge systems emerged from colonialism's epistemic architecture. Fanon (1968) describes this as an ontological reordering that positions Europe as the exclusive source of reason and civilisation and as the dominant force in the psychological, cultural, and intellectual spheres. African ways of knowing, rooted in oral traditions, communal ethics, and ecological relationality, were recast as primitive, while Western epistemologies asserted universality. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) describes this phenomenon as the systematic alienation of the African mind, arguing that the imposition of colonial language, education, and culture deliberately severed indigenous populations from their histories and cosmologies. The enforcement of European languages was a primary strategy for displacing Indigenous thought. This epistemic hierarchy persists today; as Mbembe (2001) argues, the colonial archive continues to structure African subjectivity through inherited logics of control, a dynamic evident in the contemporary privileging of Euro-Christian norms within education and governance. In South Africa, these dynamics were institutionalised through missionary activity and colonial legislation, which redefined African existence according to Western categories of civilisation, land ownership, and moral conduct. Edendale exemplifies this entanglement. As Meintjes (2020) observes, Edendale’s later residents operated within a framework of conditional autonomy: access to land, education, and social recognition required adherence to colonial expectations of Christian morality, individual property, and industriousness. These norms reconfigured Indigenous kinship

structures and communal values along patriarchal and individualist lines, often at the expense of practices such as polygamy, hereditary chieftaincy, and communal land tenure (Mkhize, 2015; Swartz, 2015). Missionary education functioned as a primary site of epistemic inscription, promoting Western knowledge while actively discouraging Indigenous social institutions.

Crucially, however, epistemic imposition in Edendale was never absolute. Even as the community absorbed elements of colonial modernity, its Indigenous inhabitants engaged in continuous processes of negotiation, adaptation, and resistance. Epprecht (2017) characterises Edendale as an intellectually vibrant and politically conscious community that persistently sought self-definition amid shifting colonial and postcolonial pressures, indicating enduring cultural agency under constraint. This partial persistence of African epistemologies, often in fragmented or hybrid forms, affirms that AIKS were neither eradicated nor preserved unchanged, but dynamically reconfigured through historical engagement.

It is within this complex terrain of imposition, adaptation, and quiet endurance that Afrocentricity emerges as a necessary theoretical orientation. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) contends that the decolonial project must confront the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, which continues to privilege Western thought in postcolonial institutions. This aligns with Wiredu's (1998) call for conceptual decolonisation, which urges the re-grounding of African philosophy in Indigenous conceptual frameworks and, with wa Muiu (2010) insists that African development and education must be reconstructed from an Afrocentric standpoint that affirms African agency, spirituality, and communal ethics as legitimate sources of knowledge.

Afrocentricity, as articulated by Asante (2020), provides a philosophical recentering of African consciousness, culture, and agency in the analysis of historical and contemporary realities. It facilitates a re-examination of Edendale that transcends binary narratives of passive victimhood or cultural purity. Instead, it reveals how communities forged identities and knowledge systems through sustained engagement, sometimes oppositional, sometimes dialogic, with colonial epistemic demands. This approach resonates with Fanon's (1968) call for the reconstitution of the self and Ngũgĩ's (1986) vision of cultural reclamation as a decolonial act. Edendale thus emerges not only as a site of colonial inscription but as a compelling microcosm of African intellectual resilience and epistemic creativity.

1.3 Location of the Study

This study was situated in the original Edendale mission station, now part of Greater Edendale, in the Msunduzi Municipality of KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. Greater Edendale forms part of the broader Pietermaritzburg urban area, the provincial capital, and spans approximately 635 km², with a population of around 617,000 residents (Zuma, 2021).

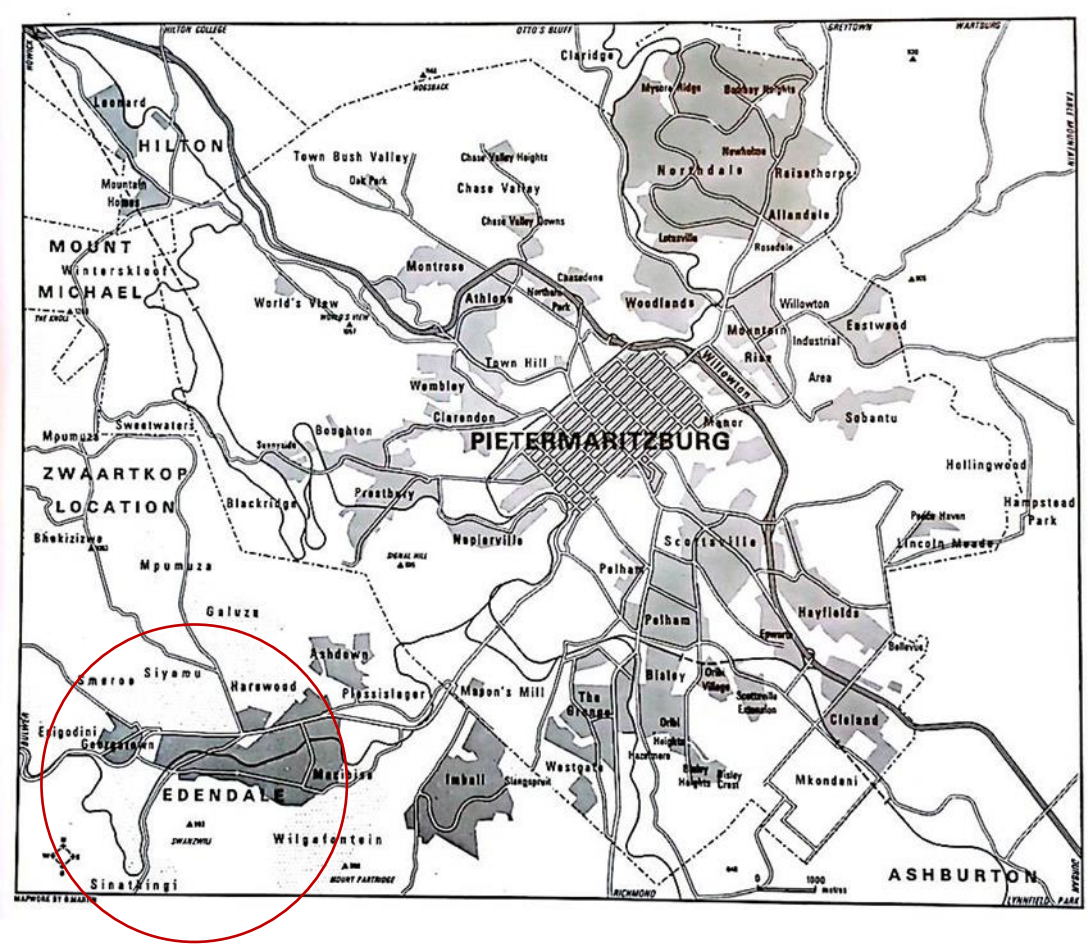


Figure 1.1: Edendale and Georgetown in relation to Pietermaritzburg and surrounds (Wills, 1988)

Characterised today as a peri-urban township, Greater Edendale bears the layered imprints of missionary settlement, colonial land dispossession, apartheid spatial engineering, and post-apartheid urbanisation. Georgetown, the urban settlement created as part of the establishment of the Edendale mission station, and the farmland that originally surrounded it serve as the bounded focus of this research. As Epprecht (2017) notes, this iteration of Edendale emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century as a residential and agricultural settlement for *amakholwa*, African Christian converts.

Historically, the land that became Edendale was a Boer farm known as *Welverdiend* ("well-deserved") awarded to Boer leader, Andries Pretorius, by the British colonial authorities following the annexation of Natal in 1843, for his victory in the Battle of *Ncome* (Blood River) in 1838, an event commemorated in Afrikaner nationalist mythology as a divine triumph of civilisation over barbarism (Etherington, 1983; Meintjes, 2020). This transfer of land ownership symbolised the broader colonial process of dispossession that Fanon (1968) described as the "reordering of space and meaning" (p. 170), in which conquest was not only territorial but also epistemic, recasting African land and culture through European values of property and sovereignty. In the early 1850s, Reverend James Allison, a missionary who had split from the Wesleyan Missionary Society due to theological and cultural differences, led a group of African converts to settle in this area (Mkhize, 2015; Swartz, 2015) and buy the land (apparently cleared of Indigenous inhabitants by Pretorius).

As understood in the analyses of Mkhize (2015) and Swartz (2015), these "African converts" were not newly Christianised subjects upon their arrival in Edendale in 1851. However, individuals are already profoundly shaped by prior missionary incorporation. Their conversion had entailed far-reaching reconfigurations of culture, belief systems, language use, dress, and everyday practices. In this reading, conversion was not simply the outcome of voluntary persuasion but was frequently embedded within coercive and disciplinary missionary regimes. Consequently, for these people, the establishment of Edendale did not initiate cultural or epistemic transformation; rather, it consolidated an already ongoing process of epistemic displacement and social reorientation away from Indigenous modes of being and knowing. However, subsequent to the creation of Edendale, local Indigenous people from the area came to work and settle there over a period of time, thus coming into contact with the initial *amakholwa* and the mission/colonial regime.

Missionaries' rejection of practices such as polygamy, hereditary chieftaincy, and communal land tenure, core institutions of African Indigenous social life, reflected the tension between Christian conversion and African identity. Under Allison's leadership, the settlement of Edendale was structured as a Christian community, modelled on Western ideals of respectability, individual land ownership, and formal education. As Mkhize (2015) notes, these early converts were encouraged to embody the habits of "civilised living", demonstrating to surrounding African communities the moral and intellectual superiority of Christian life. In the process, many were estranged from their Indigenous kinship systems and subsumed into the missionary household economy.

Throughout the late nineteenth century, Edendale evolved as a semi-autonomous *amakholwa* settlement, a space where Christianised Africans could own land, establish churches, and pursue education. However, as Meintjes (2020) observes, their autonomy remained precarious, contingent upon alignment with colonial expectations of moral discipline, industriousness, and loyalty to the British Crown. This ambivalent positioning led many Edendale men to serve in colonial military campaigns, including the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, in hopes of securing recognition and land protection under colonial law (Meintjes, 2020).

The institutionalisation of racial governance in the twentieth century further reconfigured Edendale's socio-political structure. In 1910, the Natal Colony was incorporated into the Union of South Africa, consolidating white minority rule. By 1927, Edendale was formalised as a Section 30 Town under the Black Administration Act 38 of 1927 (Msunduzi IDP, 2020-2021), placing African communities under direct state supervision. The apartheid regime, which came to power in 1948, deepened these inequalities through forced removals, spatial segregation, and the systematic marginalisation of black townships. Consequently, Edendale, once envisioned as a model of African self-reliance, became trapped in cycles of poverty, ill health, and unemployment that persist to the present day (Msunduzi IDP, 2020-2021).

Despite these challenges, Edendale's history stands out in South Africa's urban landscape for its sustained engagement with education, religion, agriculture, artisan skills, and local self-organisation. Epprecht (2017), in *Welcome to Greater Edendale: Histories of Environment, Health, and Gender in an African City*, depicts Edendale as an intellectually vibrant and politically conscious community that continually sought to define itself amid shifting colonial and postcolonial realities. Studies by Meintjes (2020) and Garner (1998) reveal that Edendale's development was shaped by internal class differentiation (particularly between the original followers of Allison and their descendants, and local Indigenous people), land struggles, and the rise of African Independent Churches that reasserted Indigenous forms of spirituality and leadership within Christian frameworks.

Unlike other parts of Edendale that experienced extensive state-led demolition, forced removals, and spatial reconfiguration under apartheid, Georgetown maintained a relatively sustained though not unbroken social fabric. This included multi-generational households, longstanding church congregations, and informal networks through which knowledge related to pre-colonial practices in healing, agriculture, and oral history was transmitted across

generations (Meintjes, 2020). However, from the early 1990s onward, broader processes of urban restructuring, housing mobility, and socio-economic transformation led to the relocation of many descendants of the original settler families – a trend documented in census-based analyses of population turnover in the Msunduzi area (Statistics South Africa, 1996; 2001; 2011). These demographic shifts are acknowledged as part of Edendale's evolving social landscape. Nevertheless, Edendale continues to offer significant analytical value as a historically shaped site where the legacies of mission settlement, colonial governance, and enduring institutional frameworks intersect with ongoing contemporary changes. It is precisely this layered history of partial continuity amid transformation, combined with its deep entanglement with missionary education and colonial governance, that makes Edendale a strategic micro-site for tracing how AIKS have been suppressed, reshaped, and reclaimed over time (Meintjes, 2020).

Examined through an Afrocentric lens, Edendale thus represents more than a geographic location; it is a historical and epistemological site where African agency persisted within structures of domination. Its community life, religious institutions, and educational practices reflect ongoing attempts to reconcile Western and Indigenous ways of knowing. The community's experience, marked by both adaptation and resistance, embodies what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2022) describes as "entangled modernities", a condition in which colonial impositions and African intellectual endurance coexist in creative tension. Today, Edendale remains a dynamic urban township, marked by social complexity and cultural resilience. Its contemporary struggles with unemployment, inequality, and educational challenges are rooted in a longer history of epistemic dispossession and survival. By situating this study within Edendale, the research aims to uncover how the legacies of missionary education, colonial governance, and Indigenous knowledge continue to interact in shaping African consciousness, identity, and learning in the postcolonial present.

1.4 Rationale, Purpose, and Significance of the Study

This study forms part of the broader Edendale History Project (EHP), an ongoing research initiative dedicated to retelling and rewriting the silenced narratives of the Edendale community. The project is grounded in an Afrocentric paradigm that seeks to recover, reconstruct, and validate African epistemologies overshadowed by colonial and missionary

knowledge systems (Asante, 2020). Within this larger framework, the present study specifically explores the historical and contemporary influences of Western knowledge systems on AIKS in Edendale, focusing on Edendale as a case study. The rationale for this study emerges from the enduring dominance of Western epistemologies and the resulting marginalisation of African ways of knowing. As I have argued above, within Edendale, a historically African Christian community shaped by missionary influence, this tension between Western and Indigenous epistemologies remains deeply embedded in social life and education (Epprecht, 2017). The study, therefore, seeks to expose how such epistemic hierarchies continue to shape learning, identity, and cultural memory in postcolonial South Africa, and how these have been resisted.

My personal and intellectual motivation for undertaking this study lies in a commitment to reclaiming African knowledge systems from epistemic marginalisation. As a researcher, I do not approach this inquiry as a neutral observer but as an engaged participant who recognises both the historical erasure of Indigenous knowledge and the need to restore African intellectual agency. From this standpoint, the study becomes both an academic and emancipatory project, an act of epistemic justice aimed at restoring the centrality of African consciousness in understanding our past and shaping our educational futures.

This research is important because it addresses a clear gap in the existing literature. While Edendale's history has been explored from multiple angles ranging from missionary activity and class formation (Meintjes, 2020), gender and health histories (Epprecht, 2017), to the violence and economic transformations of the twentieth century (Garner, 1998; Stavrou et al., 1989), there remains limited scholarly attention on how Western knowledge systems have influenced, reshaped, or suppressed African Indigenous knowledge in Edendale. This study responds directly to that gap by documenting and analysing the epistemic encounters between these knowledge systems from an Afrocentric lens, privileging African voices and interpretations of their own history.

In contributing to scholarship, this research does more than chronicle historical events; it theorises learning as a decolonial process. Drawing on Asante's (1998) concept of Afrocentric consciousness, the study examines how the interrelated processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning enable communities to move from epistemic dependency to intellectual self-definition. Afrocentricity informs this work as both a theory and a paradigm. As a theory, it offers analytical concepts such as African agency, cultural location, and the

recentering of African epistemic authority, which help interpret how knowledge systems are contested and reconstructed.

As a paradigm, it grounds the research in an African worldview that sees knowledge as relational, life-affirming, and rooted in collective memory, spirituality, and ecological balance. Building on this dual orientation, the study advances an original contribution: the Learning–Unlearning–Relearning Analytical Model for Afrocentric Epistemic Transformation, introduced in Chapter Four. The model offers a structured, process-oriented framework for understanding how communities navigate epistemic ruptures and renewals. The inclusion of the EHP research team and community knowledge holders ensures the research is participatory and transformative, aligning with Fanon's (1968) vision of liberation through praxis. This collaborative approach enables Knowledge holders to engage critically with their histories and articulate their own narratives, transforming memory into a site of learning and resistance.

The study's significance is therefore multidimensional. Firstly, it attempts to reclaim Edendale's Indigenous epistemological heritage, contributing to the struggle of memory against forgetting (Preece, 2009) by creating an alternative archive that documents community experiences, oral traditions, and cultural wisdom. Secondly, by situating Edendale within the discourse of decoloniality and Afrocentric scholarship, the study advances Afrocentricity both as a paradigm and a theory. As a paradigm, it challenges Eurocentric assumptions in knowledge production by positioning African people as active subjects of their histories; as a theory, it provides conceptual tools for examining how knowledge is produced, transmitted, and legitimised within colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Ultimately, this study makes an original contribution by articulating Afrocentricity as a dynamic learning theory, distinct from its more commonly invoked role as a broad cultural or philosophical paradigm. While Afrocentricity has long been advanced as a worldview that centres African agency and experience, this research teases out its specific mechanisms for epistemic transformation through the interrelated processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning. In doing so, it offers a contextually grounded analytical framework – the Learning-Unlearning-Relearning Model – that clarifies how communities in Edendale navigate the complex legacies of missionary education and colonial epistemology. Rather than framing reclamation as a return to a pre-colonial past, the study shows it to be an ongoing, critical, and creative act of intellectual self-definition, reconfiguring knowledge, identity, and pedagogy in the present.

1.5 Research Objectives of the Study

Given the purpose and significance of this study, as discussed above, namely, to interrogate the dominance of Western knowledge systems over AIKS from an Afrocentric standpoint and to re-centre African epistemic agency within the historical and contemporary context of Edendale, the specific research objectives are as follows:

1. To comprehend and document historical and evolving African Indigenous knowledge processes to learn from the past and possibly build stronger and more resilient future communities.
2. To comprehend from an Afrocentric perspective, the impacts of the Western Knowledge System on the African Indigenous Knowledge Systems.
3. To understand how the impacts of the Western knowledge system altered the Indigenous practices and knowledge acquisition processes of the Edendale community.

1.6 Research Questions

Given these objectives, my main research question is:

What can be learned from the history of African Indigenous Knowledge that can inform the future in the quest to bring to consciousness the inherent value of the African Indigenous Knowledge Systems?

The following sub-questions support this main research question:

1. What were the historical practices that constitute Indigenous knowledge within the context of the Edendale community?
2. What are the impacts of the Western knowledge system on the African Indigenous Knowledge Systems?
3. How have the impacts of the Western knowledge system altered the Indigenous practices and knowledge acquisition processes of the Edendale community?

1.7 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

As noted in Section 1.4, Afrocentricity functions in this research at two interconnected levels: as a paradigm and as a theory. As a paradigm, it constitutes a worldview that affirms African

being, relationality, and epistemic sovereignty as the foundation for all inquiry (Mazama, 2003). It shapes the study's ethical posture, participatory design, and commitment to centring African voices as co-creators of knowledge. As a theory, Afrocentricity provides specific analytical concepts such as agency, cultural location, and epistemic sovereignty that help interpret the ways in which knowledge is contested, displaced, and reclaimed (Asante, 1998). In this study, it is articulated as a learning theory, operationalised through the learning-unlearning-relearning triad, which offers a dynamic model for understanding epistemic transformation in postcolonial contexts like Edendale. To ensure conceptual clarity, this study distinguishes the interconnected ways in which Afrocentricity is operationalised. As a philosophical orientation, Afrocentricity positions African experiences, cultures, and epistemologies as the primary lens through which African realities are understood (Asante, 1987; Mazama, 2001). As a theoretical framework, it provides the analytical concepts of agency, location, and cultural centredness that guide the interpretation of empirical data (Asante, 1998). In this study, these principles are operationalised through the Learning–Unlearning–Relearning (LUR) framework, which explains processes of epistemic transformation.

Methodologically, Afrocentricity informs the research design by privileging participatory, dialogic, and relational approaches, including oral history, Transect Walks, and the River of Life workshop, which recognise participants as co-creators of knowledge rather than research subjects (Reviere, 2001; Chilisa, 2019). At the paradigmatic level, Afrocentricity assumes that reality is relational, knowledge is communally constructed, and inquiry is inseparable from ethical and political commitments (Mazama, 2001). Collectively, these dimensions position Afrocentricity not only as an interpretive framework but also as an emancipatory project that seeks to restore African epistemic agency and challenge the historical marginalisation of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Hlela, 2018). Within this study, the LUR framework and the Afrocentric methodology constitute the principal analytical and procedural foundations of the research.

In this way, the theoretical framework provides the intellectual lens through which the study interprets and analyses phenomena. As Abend (2019) explains, theories serve to “explain, predict, and understand phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge” (p. 11). A sound theoretical foundation enables the researcher to interpret lived realities within a coherent worldview and to engage critically with dominant assumptions about knowledge and meaning (Kivunja, 2018). This study employs Afrocentrism as a

theoretical framework. While it shares concerns with postcolonial and decolonial critiques regarding structures of domination, it is important to clarify that Afrocentricity is not merely a subset of postcolonial theory. Rather, it operates as a distinct paradigm centred on African agency, location, and epistemic sovereignty, offering constructive tools for epistemic reclamation rather than solely functioning as a critique of Eurocentrism.

Furthermore, while Afrocentricity and decoloniality share a commitment to confronting colonial legacies, they are distinct paradigms that do not necessarily always converge. Decoloniality, rooted primarily in Latin American Modernity/Coloniality scholarship (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2017; Maldonado-Torres, 2007), focuses on dismantling the colonial matrix of power and epistemic dependency. Afrocentricity, by contrast, centres African agency, cultural location, and epistemic sovereignty as constructive foundations for knowledge production and self-definition (Asante, 1987; Mazama, 2001). This study draws on both traditions, where they complement one another, but is firmly grounded in the Afrocentric paradigm. Whereas postcolonial theory exposes the enduring structures of domination, capitalism, and Eurocentrism (Ashcroft et al., 2017; Mendoza & Zachariah, 2022), Afrocentrism advances beyond critique by offering constructive theoretical tools for epistemic reclamation. As Prah (in Chilisa & Preece, 2005) insists, “we cannot in all seriousness study ourselves through other people’s assumptions … we must think for ourselves as others do for themselves” (p. 48). This emphasis on self-definition, self-knowledge, and self-liberation forms the theoretical heart of Afrocentrism.

As a theoretical framework, Afrocentricity provides the conceptual basis for excavating marginalised Indigenous epistemologies and repositioning them as legitimate systems of knowledge. Within this study, it is operationalised through the Learning–Unlearning–Relearning (LUR) framework, which conceptualises epistemic transformation as a cyclical process through which individuals and communities critically interrogate colonial knowledge systems and actively reconstruct African epistemic agency. While the framework draws inspiration from broader traditions of transformative learning, critical consciousness, and decolonial thought (Freire, 1970; Fanon, 1963), it represents a distinct Afrocentric contribution.

Unlike transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, 2000), which primarily conceptualises transformation as individual cognitive change through critical reflection, the LUR framework situates learning within African relational ontology, emphasising collective transformation, cultural continuity, and communal accountability. It similarly resonates with Freire's (1970)

concept of critical consciousness in recognising the need to challenge internalised colonial domination. However, it extends this perspective by foregrounding the reconstruction of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems through ancestral relationality and cultural sovereignty rather than liberation alone. The framework also complements decolonial pedagogy (Mignolo, 2011; Walsh, 2012), which critiques the coloniality of knowledge, by providing a structured model that explains how epistemic transformation unfolds through the interconnected processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning. In doing so, it moves beyond epistemic critique to illuminate the active regeneration of Indigenous knowledge within contemporary African contexts.

The originality of the LUR framework, therefore, lies in three interrelated features. First, it is explicitly grounded in Afrocentric ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Second, it conceptualises epistemic transformation as a recursive process of learning, unlearning, and relearning rather than as a linear or solely cognitive endeavour. Third, it positions African cultural sovereignty and the reconstruction of Indigenous knowledge as both the foundation and the intended outcome of epistemic transformation. Together, these features establish the LUR framework as an Afrocentric analytical model for understanding how communities reclaim epistemic agency in postcolonial contexts. In the context of Edendale, Afrocentrism serves as a theoretical lens, enabling the reinterpretation of local histories and epistemic practices within their own cultural and historical framework. It facilitates the "re-membering" (Asante, 1998) of African experiences that were fragmented by Western epistemic domination and reframes knowledge acquisition as a process of redefining identity and being in the world (Oloruntoba, 2015; Tolliver, 2015).

This aligns with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (2000) call for an active rejection of "otherness" imposed by colonial epistemologies and a movement from epistemic unfreedom to freedom (Hlela, 2018). Afrocentrism thus functions as both a theoretical lens and a conceptual process of transformation. It posits that reclaiming African ways of knowing requires an iterative engagement with history, memory, and collective reflection. Through this framework, knowledge holders in the study are not passive subjects but co-creators of knowledge, engaging in reflective dialogue, self-reflection, and communal reconstruction of meaning. This active process is central to the theoretical conception of Afrocentrism as a movement toward self-knowledge, freedom, and humanisation (Chawane, 2016; Gordon, 2011).

In alignment with the study's purpose and rationale, Afrocentrism as a theory enables the excavation of AIKS that have been marginalised or silenced by Western epistemic

dominance. It provides the analytical and conceptual tools necessary for understanding how knowledge has been shaped, displaced, and reclaimed within the Edendale community. The Afrocentric framework thus provides a lens to explore how African knowledge holders can unlearn the internalised hierarchies of colonial knowledge and relearn the epistemic principles rooted in their own cultural heritage.

Ultimately, this theoretical orientation laid the groundwork for the study by necessitating a research design that aligned with Afrocentric principles. Because the study engages with deeply personal, communal, and transformative processes of unlearning and relearning, it required a methodology that was participatory, dialogic, and ethically grounded in African relationality. This meant privileging oral narratives, centring community knowledge holders as co-researchers, and creating spaces where epistemic authority was shared rather than extracted. As detailed in Chapter Five, the research design therefore adopted an Afrocentric qualitative approach that mirrored the very processes it sought to understand: it attempted to create conditions for critical reflection (learning), challenges to inherited epistemic assumptions (unlearning), and support for the co-construction of knowledge grounded in African cultural logic (relearning). In this way, the methodology did not merely apply the theory; it enacted it.

1.8 Research Design

By situating the research within an Afrocentric paradigm, the study adheres to Asante's (1998) principle that the African experience must serve as the starting point for all inquiries into African realities. By situating Africans as active agents of knowledge rather than passive objects of study, the Afrocentric design challenges the epistemic hierarchies established by colonialism. Mazama (2001) explains that Afrocentricity seeks to reposition African thought and experience at the centre of analysis to restore cultural and intellectual balance. This approach enables the research to serve as a corrective lens through which the suppression of AIKS can be examined and its vitality reclaimed. The research design, therefore, combines historical recovery and participatory reclamation. The historical dimension is addressed through archival and document analysis, which enables the tracing of how colonial education, religious teachings, and land policies displaced Indigenous epistemologies in Edendale. Bowers (2021) maintains that understanding how knowledge was dismembered is essential before any meaningful attempt at reconstruction can take place.

Furthermore, the design is structured around the Afrocentric processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning, as discussed above. As Asante (2020) explains, learning refers to recognising the influence of the Western Knowledge System; unlearning involves a conscious rejection of colonial assumptions; and relearning entails grounding one's understanding in African experiences and perspectives. In this study, these processes serve as both a method and a philosophy, guiding interactions between the researcher and the knowledge holders toward mutual transformation. In essence, this Afrocentric research design serves as both a methodology of recovery and a practice of liberation.

The research was conducted in collaboration with a research team from the Edendale History Project (EHP), comprising community members trained in ethical and participatory research methods. This study employed an exploratory case study design to enable an in-depth investigation of the interplay between Western and African Indigenous knowledge systems. Knowledge holders were initially intended to be identified purposefully, guided by criteria including long-term residency, recognised roles as faith-based or cultural community figures, and descent from early *amakholwa* settlers. However, as noted earlier in the section on the study's location, most descendants of the original settlers who arrived with Reverend James Allison have relocated from Georgetown and the wider Edendale area due to urban restructuring, housing mobility, and socio-economic transformation. As a result, it was not possible to include direct descendants of the original *amakholwa* settlers in the study.

The knowledge holders who ultimately participated in this research were therefore not drawn from the Allison settler lineage, but from Indigenous families rooted in the area before missionary settlement. Many of these participants were born and raised in Edendale and Georgetown and belong to communities that were themselves subjected to processes of colonialism and coloniality. Despite these disruptions, they have retained and transmitted aspects of AIKS associated with the area's original inhabitants, predating Allison's arrival and his followers. Accordingly, the narratives generated in this study reflect the perspectives of Indigenous communities whose epistemic traditions existed before, alongside, and in tension with missionary and colonial knowledge regimes, rather than those of the *amakholwa* settler descendants themselves.

The sample was expanded through snowball sampling as initial knowledge holders recommended others with relevant epistemic insights. The final sample comprised ten Black African residents selected for their deep embeddedness in Edendale's intergenerational memory and knowledge practices. An expanded discussion of the research design, including

the sampling strategy, data generation methods, and ethical procedures, is provided in Chapter Five.

1.9 Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis is outlined as follows:

Chapter Two reviews the available literature on Indigenous knowledge systems, with a particular focus on AIKS. It also situates these concepts within broader debates on the contextual nature of knowledge and the coloniality of knowledge.

Chapter Three provides background information on Edendale. It includes a review of published literature on the area to establish the historical and socio-political context of the study.

Chapter Four outlines the study's theoretical framework, specifically Afrocentrism.

Chapter Five presents the research design and methodology used in this study. It discusses the Afrocentric paradigm that frames the study; the research approach and style aligned with this paradigm; the data generation methods, including sampling knowledge holders; and the processes for analysing the data. It also discusses measures taken to ensure ethical conduct and research quality, as well as the study's limitations.

Chapter Six presents the data generated through archival research. It offers an alternative reading of Edendale's history, comparing it with the published accounts discussed in Chapter Three, and provides an initial analysis of the archival data.

Chapter Seven presents the data generated in collaboration with the knowledge holders through oral history interviews, a Transect Walk, and a collective River of Life exercise, focusing on the Edendale community.

Chapter Eight provides the analysis and discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis. It summarises the main findings and reflects on the research process.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the study by situating it within broader debates on the interaction between Western and AIKS, emphasising the historical and contemporary effects of epistemic dominance and marginalisation. It also outlined the context of Edendale, a community established on Western Christian values, and clarified the study's focus, rationale, and significance. In addition, the chapter presented the Afrocentric theoretical lens and the concepts of learning, unlearning, and relearning that frame the study. Building on this foundation, Chapter Two provides a critical review of the literature on Indigenous Knowledge Systems, with a particular focus on AIKS**.** It further situates these discussions within broader debates about the contextual nature of knowledge and the coloniality of knowledge. This engagement with existing scholarship provides the conceptual and historical grounding necessary to understand how knowledge has been constructed, disrupted, and reshaped in the African context.

African Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Historical Context

2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter introduced the study by outlining its background, research problem, aims, and significance. It argued that the dominance of Western Knowledge Systems has profoundly shaped epistemic practice in Africa, often resulting in the marginalisation and silencing of AIKS. An Afrocentric perspective is thus essential for interrogating this imbalance as it centres African lived experiences, cultural values, and historical routes in the production and validation of knowledge. The chapter further clarified the study's methodological stance, grounded in learning, unlearning, and relearning, as a means of understanding how communities can reclaim and revitalise Indigenous knowledge within contemporary contexts. Building on that foundation, this chapter provides a critical review of the theoretical and conceptual debates that inform the study.

I begin by examining knowledge as contextually dependent, showing how epistemological traditions reflect the cultural, historical, and political environments from which they emerge. This first section contrasts Eurocentric claims of universality with African-centred interpretations that position knowledge as relational, lived, and embedded in community life. In doing so, the chapter highlights the limitations of Western epistemic dominance and foregrounds the value of epistemic plurality. The chapter then turns to Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge Systems more broadly. Scholars such as Langton and Rhea (2005), Sitsha (2023), and Zinyeka (2016) demonstrate that while Indigenous Knowledge refers to the content of knowledge skills, technologies, and practices, Indigenous Knowledge Systems encompass the frameworks and processes that organise, validate, and transmit that knowledge. Although analytically distinct, the two overlap in practice; thus, both terms are used relationally throughout this study. This section also engages with global and local scholarship, demonstrating the holistic, adaptive, and experiential nature of Indigenous epistemologies.

The discussion then narrows to AIKS in particular, exploring their philosophical foundations, ontological assumptions, and diverse forms of knowing. In this section, the chapter engages with African philosophers such as Gyekye (2011), Mbiti (1990), and Ramose (2005) to

explain how African worldviews conceptualise knowledge as ethical, communal, and deeply intertwined with spirituality, identity, and environment. It also demonstrates that AIKS are neither archaic nor static, but dynamic and resilient systems that have endured despite centuries of disruption.

To contextualise these disruptions, the chapter examines colonialism and the coloniality of knowledge. It demonstrates how colonial rule sought to control African land and labour, as well as to dominate African consciousness through missionary education, epistemic erasure, and the imposition of Western rationalities. Drawing on scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), Ngũgĩ (2000), Mudimbe (1988), and Quijano (2000), the chapter argues that coloniality persists in postcolonial institutions, manifesting through epistemic hierarchies, knowledge dependency, and continued privileging of Western frameworks.

Finally, the chapter outlines the challenges facing African Indigenous knowledge today. These include the erosion of communalism and *Ubuntu*, the marginalisation of Indigenous epistemologies within Western-oriented education systems, the weakening of intergenerational knowledge transmission through practices such as old-age homes, and ongoing epistemological, conceptual, and methodological issues affecting the documentation, translation, and validation of AIKS. Collectively, these challenges demonstrate that revitalising Indigenous Knowledge requires intentional processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning.

2.2 Knowledge as Contextually Dependent

The concept of knowledge has been explored from various perspectives, including its historical, epistemological, and practical dimensions. Scholars have explored the formation, transmission, and application of knowledge, examining its multifaceted nature and implications. According to Mdhluli et al. (2021) and Ting (2022), knowledge, in a general perspective, encompasses the collective understanding, awareness, and skills acquired by individuals and societies through learning, experience, and the dissemination of information. It serves as the cornerstone of intellectual development, shaping societies and influencing individual and collective decisions. Headrick (2000) holds that the term "knowledge" refers to a body of facts and principles accumulated by humanity over time. However, knowledge does not exist independently of the cultural and historical contexts that produce it. Dei (2012) reminds us that knowledge is not innocent; it is born within power, culture, and history. This

section examines how epistemology is shaped by social experience, language, and power relations. Therefore, what one group perceives as knowledge, according to Ezeanya Asiobu (2019), may not hold the same importance for another group in a different location. Environmental factors, language, and the biological and cultural characteristics of each group are essential in determining how knowledge is classified and valued. Hence, knowledge is not merely the accumulation of facts and information; it is a dynamic and transformative force that nurtures communal wellbeing, sustains ancestral wisdom, and fosters collective renewal in alignment with African Indigenous epistemologies (Dei, 2011).

Acknowledging that knowledge construction is guided by cultural context, the history of knowledge from both Eurocentric and Afrocentric perspectives presents diverse conceptions on the development and dissemination of knowledge. Supporting this viewpoint, Santos (2007) holds that each understanding of the "world" encompasses epistemological and ontological assumptions intertwined with specific (historical and cultural) ways of understanding and being. Eurocentric views attribute the development of knowledge to Western values while Afrocentric perspectives challenge this notion by emphasising the impact of colonialism, imperialism, and neocolonialism on underdevelopment and inequality in African societies (Abdi, 2020).

It is worth noting that perspectives on the development of knowledge are not monolithic: there exists diversity within each. Even within European/Western thought, there has been a consistent ongoing debate and disagreement, with some ‘Western’ scholars deliberately adopting an anti-Eurocentric stance (Gavristova et al., 2022). Similarly, it is essential to recognise that not all African intellectuals strictly adhere to or advocate Afrocentrism; some scholars actively embrace Eurocentric viewpoints (Adeleke, 2015). This underscores the diversity of perspectives within African intellectual discourse and highlights the complex interaction between various ideological frameworks. With this understanding in mind, the following sections review the general trend of arguments within both perspectives.

2.2.1 The cultural location of knowledge

Epistemology is inseparable from the cultural, historical, and political contexts that shape it. As Wiredu (1998) and Hountondji (1997) contend, all reasoning is culture-bound, mediated through linguistic structures and moral frameworks, while Dei (2012) affirms that knowledge is inherently situated and culturally mediated, emerging from specific lived realities and serving distinct human purposes. Foucault (1980) further argues that knowledge is never

neutral but entangled with power, forming “regimes of truth” that legitimise certain voices while marginalising others, thus rendering knowledge production a political act that enacts inclusion, exclusion, and hierarchy. The Western ideal of objective, universal knowledge, celebrated since the Enlightenment, obscures this reality by presenting culturally specific European epistemologies as neutral and global.

In Africa, colonialism entrenched such a regime, positioning European thought as universal and African knowledge systems as inferior or anecdotal, a dynamic Hountondji (1997) terms “epistemic dependence”. Afrocentric scholarship challenges this false universalism by asserting that all knowledge, including that which claims universality, is rooted in particular cultural contexts (Mkabela, 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Rather than oppose “local” and “universal” as binaries, Afrocentric thinkers reject this dichotomy altogether, recognising that every epistemology originates in a specific worldview, even those that masquerade as culture-free (Asante, 2009; Dei, 2012). Contextuality is thus not a limitation but an epistemic strength: it grounds knowledge in the lived experiences, languages, and cosmologies of its bearers, making it responsive, relevant, and resilient. This stance enables a dialogical openness engaging global knowledge systems without ceding interpretive sovereignty (Wiredu, 1998; Ntseane, 2011). Recentering African epistemologies, therefore, is not about isolation, but about restoring epistemic balance and affirming Africa as a site of theory-making.

2.2.2 Western universalism and the myth of objectivity

The project of epistemic recentering undertaken in this study necessitates a critical interrogation of the historical and philosophical foundations of Western knowledge claims. Central to this tradition is the Enlightenment ideal of universal reason, which presents knowledge as objective, value-neutral, culture-independent, and universally applicable. This epistemological stance, epitomised by Descartes’s cogito (I think, therefore I am), assumes a strict dualism between mind and body, reason and emotion, and subject and object. The Cartesian subject is portrayed as a detached, autonomous knower capable of producing universally valid knowledge independent of social, historical, or cultural context. However, as Harding, as cited by Mkabela (2015), demonstrates, this purported neutrality is deeply ideological: it obscures the historically and culturally specific positionality of the knower, an implicitly European, male subject, while projecting his worldview as universally valid. Rather than representing knowledge from "nowhere," Harding argues that all knowledge is

socially situated and that acknowledging diverse epistemic standpoints produces what she terms strong objectivity, a more rigorous and inclusive form of knowledge production. This epistemological framework is not merely philosophical; it has been institutionalised through colonial education systems. Missionary and colonial schools systematically devalued African languages and Indigenous knowledge practices, promoting instead European curricula that located legitimate knowledge exclusively in written texts, scientific laboratories, and quantifiable data (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Odora Hoppers, 2002). Colonial education, therefore, functioned not simply to transmit knowledge but to establish Western epistemology as the sole legitimate standard against which all other knowledge traditions were judged. In doing so, they instantiated what Santos (2018) terms "abyssal thinking", a global epistemic divide that positions the West as the locus of reason and modernity, and the non-West, particularly Africa, as the domain of tradition, myth, and epistemic invisibility. Importantly, critiques of Western universalism are not confined to African or decolonial scholarship. They also emerge from critical traditions within Western thought itself. Scholars such as Harding (1998, 2015), Foucault (1980), and Santos (2018) demonstrate that claims of epistemic neutrality frequently obscure the cultural, historical, and political conditions under which knowledge is produced and legitimised. Foucault's (1980) concept of regimes of truth further explains how knowledge and power operate together to define what counts as legitimate knowledge.

Rather than viewing knowledge as politically neutral, Foucault argues that dominant institutions establish forms of knowledge as "truth" while marginalising alternative epistemologies. Within colonial contexts, disciplines such as ethnography, geography, anthropology, and linguistics constructed Africa as irrational, static, and incapable of independent intellectual development, thereby legitimising imperial domination by denying Africans the status of epistemic subjects (Mbembe, 2017). Knowledge production thus became a mechanism of colonial governance, shaping how Europe understood Africa and also how Africans came to understand themselves. The consequence of this epistemic ordering is a durable hierarchy that continues to structure global knowledge economies. Even after formal decolonisation, African academic institutions often reproduce Western epistemic norms through what Hountondji (1997) describes as intellectual extraversion – a reliance on European theoretical frameworks, languages, and citation practices for scholarly validation. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) extends this analysis through the concept of epistemic coloniality, highlighting the persistence of colonial power relations within contemporary knowledge

systems. Santos (2014) further identifies this process as epistemicide: the systematic erasure, devaluation, and marginalisation of non-Western ways of knowing.

This critique of Western science as culturally neutral is further supported by Harding (2015), who argues that science is multicultural and that recognising diverse knowledge systems challenges the hegemony of Western epistemologies. Similarly, Nhemachena, Hlabangane, and Matowanyika (2020) demonstrate that decolonising science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education in Africa requires moving beyond the false dichotomy that positions Western science as universal and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems as particular or inferior. They argue for an epistemological pluralism that recognises AIKS as legitimate scientific frameworks grounded in African cosmologies, empirical observation, and communal validation.

However, this critique is not an exercise in negation; it is a necessary precondition for epistemic reconstruction. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) and Santos (2018) argue, the decolonial imperative lies not in rejecting scientific knowledge but in situating it within a pluriversal epistemological framework, one that recognises all knowledge as culturally grounded and historically situated. Epistemic freedom, therefore, entails the capacity to theorise from one's own ontological and epistemological centre while engaging dialogically with other knowledge systems. Dismantling the myth of Western objectivity thus creates the conceptual and institutional space to affirm AIKS as dynamic, self-validating, and epistemologically sovereign traditions. The following section turns explicitly to these systems, examining how knowledge is generated, transmitted, and legitimised within African Indigenous epistemic frameworks.

2.3 Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The study of knowledge inevitably leads to an inquiry into how particular societies generate, validate, and transmit their understanding of the world. Over the past three decades, scholarship has increasingly recognised that every community possesses its own internally coherent body of knowledge, developed through generations of interaction with its environment and social institutions. This recognition has brought the concepts of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) to prominence. These concepts are central to this study because they express the philosophical and practical foundations

upon which African societies have historically understood themselves and their worlds. The academic conversation about Indigenous Knowledge has generated a range of related terms, including traditional knowledge, local knowledge, folk knowledge, and tacit knowledge. Each of these terms reflects disciplinary or political orientations.

Gadgil et al. (1993) associate *traditional ecological knowledge* with environmental management, while Mazzocchi (2006) links *local knowledge* to community-based innovation. Although these terms overlap, Bruchac (2014) cautions that the choice of terminology carries ideological weight. Words such as “folk” may inadvertently diminish intellectual legitimacy, whereas “indigenous” affirms historical continuity and identity. For this reason, this study adopts "Indigenous Knowledge" and "Indigenous Knowledge Systems" as preferred terms, aligning with contemporary African and global usage. However, the term "Indigenous Knowledge" is itself contested. Nhemachena, Hlabangane, and Matowanyika (2020) argue that the adjective indigenous is a colonial classificatory construct that defines African knowledge in relation to Western knowledge, thereby reinforcing an implicit hierarchy in which Western knowledge is treated as universal while African knowledge is positioned as local. Rather than abandoning the term, this study employs African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) critically and strategically, recognising both its widespread use in African scholarship and policy and the need to challenge the colonial assumptions embedded within it. In this study, AIKS refers not to static or bounded traditions, but to dynamic, evolving, and internally coherent African epistemic systems grounded in African ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies.

Globally, the value of Indigenous Knowledge has gained formal recognition. The United Nations (UNESCO, 2017) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) acknowledge Indigenous peoples as custodians of critical ecological wisdom. In rural and urban communities alike, local practices of healing, farming, and conflict resolution continue to operate alongside, and sometimes beneath, colonial structures. This resilience is also expressed through sustainable environmental management traditions that persist globally. This is evident in the agroforestry practices of the Kayapó in the Amazon (Brondizio et al., 2021), the fire management traditions of Australian Aboriginal communities (Ens et al., 2016), and the gadaa governance system in Ethiopia (Domfeh, 2007). Their contributions extend from local resource management to international policy advocacy. This global attention illustrates that Indigenous Knowledge is not a relic of the past but an indispensable resource for addressing present and future challenges. Building on this international

recognition, the notion of Indigenous Knowledge is best understood through the interrelated dimensions of content and structure, encompassing what is known and how it is known.

Scholars converge on several core characteristics of Indigenous Knowledge, though they emphasise different dimensions. Appiah-Opoku (2007) and Semali and Kincheloe (1999) both emphasise that Indigenous Knowledge is grounded in lived experience, with Appiah-Opoku focusing specifically on environmental understanding, while Semali and Kincheloe expand this to include spiritual relationships and social harmony. The common thread across these definitions is embeddedness. Bruchac (2014) and Battiste (2016) both argue that knowledge is inseparable from the language, cosmology, and value system of its holders. However, Bruchac emphasises the spatial and ancestral rootedness implied by the term "indigenous".

Battiste further argues that such knowledge is fundamentally holistic, refusing Western compartmentalisations of science, religion, and art. This holism, Battiste contends, views science, religion, and art as interdependent expressions of the same reality rather than separate spheres. Consequently, as these scholars demonstrate, Indigenous Knowledge is inherently contextual and dynamic, evolving in response to environmental change, social innovation, and intercultural exchange. While Indigenous Knowledge refers primarily to the content of what is known, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) refer to the structures and processes through which such knowledge is generated, preserved, and transmitted. IKS thus encompass the institutions, relationships, and cultural practices that sustain Indigenous ways of knowing. According to Zinyeka (2014), these systems include oral genres, rituals, apprenticeship arrangements, and community networks that ensure continuity across generations. They also constitute epistemological frameworks, the rules of evidence, validation, and communication that make knowledge meaningful within a particular society. This distinction is crucial: the knowledge of which herbs cure certain ailments belongs to the realm of IK, whereas the community's apprenticeship system, through which healers are trained, represents IKS. The two dimensions are interdependent: without the system, knowledge cannot survive; without knowledge, the system loses purpose. Langton and Rhea (2005) argue that viewing Indigenous Knowledge as a system compels us to see it not as static folklore but as a living intellectual tradition that continually adapts to new circumstances.

Indigenous Knowledge constitutes a robust and internally coherent epistemic tradition, distinguished by five interrelated dimensions that reflect its deep integration with life,

community, and cosmos. First, it is fundamentally holistic: spiritual, moral, social, and physical realities are understood as interwoven dimensions of a unified whole rather than as separable domains (Odora Hoppers, 2002; Kaya & Seleti, 2013). This ontological orientation fosters a worldview in which knowledge serves to maintain relational balance rather than to dissect analytically. Second, it is empirical through situated practice: while often transmitted orally, it arises from generations of systematic observation, experimentation, and adaptive learning within specific ecological and cultural contexts (Ntseane, 2011; Lebeau, 2020). As a result, its validity is demonstrated by its efficacy in real-world applications, not by abstract theorisation. Third, knowledge is communally held and validated: rather than residing in individual authorship, it is stewarded through collective memory, intergenerational dialogue, and consensus (Dei, 2012; Smith, 2021). This fosters accountability and continuity across time. Fourth, Indigenous Knowledge is dynamically adaptive: it evolves through ongoing reflection, innovation, and responsiveness to environmental and social change (Mkabela, 2005; Higgs & Smith, 2016). Far from being a static tradition, it is a living process of epistemic regeneration. Finally, it is ethically and spiritually grounded: to know is to bear responsibility for ancestors, community, land, and future generations (Dei, 2012; Ntseane, 2011). Knowledge, in this sense, is not neutral information but a moral practice oriented toward harmony and well-being.

These principles align closely with Afrocentric epistemologies, which affirm knowledge as relational, contextually rooted, and life-affirming (Asante, 2009; Dei, 2012). Importantly, they render obsolete colonial-era dichotomies such as “scientific versus traditional” or “rational versus mystical”, which falsely position Western ways of knowing as the sole measure of rationality (Odora Hoppers, 2002; Santos, 2014). Recognising Indigenous Knowledge on its own terms opens pathways for epistemic pluralism and more just, inclusive modes of inquiry. The marginalisation of Indigenous Knowledge is not an oversight, but a structural outcome of the epistemic order already outlined in Section 2.2.2. Western universalism, institutionalised through colonial education, language policy, and knowledge regimes, established a hierarchy that rendered non-Western ways of knowing invisible, inferior, or irrational. However, this marginalisation extends beyond the dismissal or silencing of Indigenous knowledge. AIKS have also been actively appropriated and looted through biopiracy, the unauthorised extraction, patenting, and commercialisation of Indigenous biological knowledge and genetic resources by Western corporations and research institutions without the consent, recognition, or benefit-sharing owed to Indigenous

communities (Shiva, 1997; Mgbeoji, 2006). In this process, knowledge that was never discovered but rather cultivated over generations is rebranded as a novel Western invention, severing it from the relational, spiritual, and communal contexts that give it meaning and legitimacy. As previously noted, Santos (2014) identifies this as epistemicide. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) and Odora Hoppers (2002) demonstrate how missionary schooling and state policies codified European epistemologies as the sole standard of rationality. Eyong (2007) adds a crucial nuance: Western discourse often frames Indigenous methodologies as "trial and error", reserving the term "scientific" for Eurocentric practices. This rhetorical move naturalises epistemic dominance under the guise of objectivity. Although this hierarchy was forged in the colonial era, it endures in contemporary institutions. As highlighted earlier, African universities frequently replicate Western norms of evidence, publication, and theory-building, marginalising Indigenous epistemologies even on their own soil (Hungwe & Mkhize, 2022; Murove, 2018). This continuing epistemicide (Santos, 2014) underscores that decolonising knowledge requires more than recovery; it demands structural transformation.

Importantly, Indigenous Knowledge scholarship is not monolithic and is characterised by sustained internal debate and reflexive critique. Critical voices caution against essentialising Indigenous cultures as static or unchanging, or romanticising them as inherently harmonious or ecologically infallible. In response to these concerns, Nakata (2007) advances a *cultural interface* approach that foregrounds the complex, hybrid, and often contested coexistence of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems in postcolonial contexts. Similarly, Dei (2016) insists that Indigenous Knowledge should not be framed as isolated or pristine, but as dynamically engaged in global epistemic dialogues. Far from undermining the legitimacy of Indigenous Knowledge, such reflexivity strengthens the field by demonstrating ethical accountability and analytical rigour. Within the African context, this critical orientation aligns with Afrocentric commitments to self-critique, philosophical integrity, and adaptive renewal (Asante, 2000; Mazama, 2003), thereby enabling Indigenous Knowledge to be rearticulated in ways that address contemporary challenges without compromising its foundational values.

This critical self-awareness has accompanied a global resurgence of Indigenous Knowledge in environmental governance, health, environmental policy, and decolonial scholarship, signalling an ongoing epistemic rebalancing within global knowledge production (UNESCO, 2003; Dei, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). The emerging consensus is not that Indigenous Knowledge should be absorbed into or subsumed by Western epistemic frameworks, but that it must be recognised as an equal epistemic partner capable of co-shaping just, sustainable,

and pluralistic futures (Odora Hoppers, 2002; Santos, 2018). While Indigenous Knowledge Systems exist across diverse cultural contexts, the present study's specific analytical focus necessitates a more situated engagement. Accordingly, and moving from the general to the specific, the following section examines AIKS as a distinct and internally coherent epistemic tradition shaped by African cosmologies, histories of resistance, and communal ontologies

2.4 African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS)

AIKS refer to the collective, dynamic, and contextually grounded systems of knowing developed and sustained by African communities over time. As Odora Hoppers (2002) defines, AIKS are not a residual memory of a premodern past but a living, creative system of thought through which African communities interpret and transform their worlds. AIKS, therefore encompass interconnected domains of practice, including healing, agriculture, governance, education, spirituality, and environmental stewardship, through which knowledge is generated, transmitted, and validated within everyday life.

AIKS are embedded in social institutions and communal roles. Elders, healers, artisans, spiritual leaders, and knowledge custodians act as bearers and transmitters of knowledge, with authority derived from communal recognition, ethical conduct, and demonstrated competence (Dei, 2012; Gyekye, 2011). Knowledge transmission occurs through orality, apprenticeship, ritual practice, storytelling, and observation, ensuring continuity while allowing adaptation to changing conditions. AIKS also embodies a moral and ethical orientation. Odora Hoppers (2002) and Dei (2012) note that Indigenous epistemologies centre on relational responsibility and care. Knowledge is validated by its contribution to life, justice, and ecological harmony. Dei (2012) characterises AIKS as "a moral economy of knowledge", in which knowing involves accountability to both human and nonhuman communities. This ethic of responsibility is sustained through collective validation: elders, healers, and artisans act as custodians of knowledge whose authority derives from communal consensus and the practical application of their wisdom (Ramose, 1999; Gyekye, 2011).

Furthermore, AIKS functions as an evolving archive of African intellectual history. Hountondji (1997) asserts that Indigenous knowledge is not opposed to science or philosophy, but rather provides the foundation for endogenous knowledge production, thinking from within African worldviews rather than merely documenting them. Odora Hoppers (2002) extends this by arguing that AIKS should be understood as a framework for

generating new knowledge rather than as a collection of inherited traditions. Recognising AIKS in this way repositions African epistemologies as active, creative participants in global intellectual exchange.

Contrary to colonial portrayals of Indigenous knowledge as archaic, AIKS are adaptive and resilient. Through processes of syncretism and innovation, they continue to inform contemporary practices in education, environmental management, and sustainable development. Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) highlights how African entrepreneurs and educators employ Indigenous principles of reciprocity and stewardship to advance sustainability. Dei (2012) similarly argues that AIKS are forward-looking systems that preserve the past not as nostalgia but as a resource for renewal. This adaptability exemplifies what Santos (2018) terms *epistemic resilience*: the ability of marginalised knowledge systems to survive domination by continually rearticulating their relevance.

From an Afrocentric perspective, AIKS represent both an epistemic and political project. Asante (2009) insists that African knowledge must be studied and practised from within its own historical and cultural frames, positioning Africa as the centre rather than the object of analysis. Language is a crucial carrier of AIKS. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) reminds us that decolonisation requires linguistic reclamation, as languages embody the conceptual frameworks through which communities understand reality. Many African languages encode ecological and moral insights that cannot be adequately expressed in colonial languages. Odora Hoppers (2002) calls this the "linguistic dimension of epistemic sovereignty", warning that translation without transformation risks epistemic distortion.

Overall, AIKS constitute a dynamic, ethical, and relational framework for understanding reality. Rooted in African cosmologies that emphasise interconnectedness and moral responsibility, AIKS embody both memory and imagination, preserving ancestral wisdom while envisioning alternative futures (Dei, 2012). Defined in this way, AIKS provide the conceptual foundation for exploring the philosophical structures that sustain the specific unity of being and knowing underpinning African epistemology and ontology, as discussed in the next section. Understanding AIKS at a structural level opens the way to exploring its philosophical foundations. African epistemology and ontology underpin how African communities interpret reality, define knowledge, and understand existence. The following section, therefore, examines these foundational concepts to reveal the worldview that informs and animates AIKS.

2.4.1 African epistemology and ontology

African epistemology and ontology express a worldview in which *being* and *knowing* are inseparable: to know is to participate in life, and to exist is to engage in continuous processes of learning. Ramose (1999) describes this interdependence as the essence of *Ubuntu* philosophy: "being and knowing are mutually founding" (135). Within this framework, knowledge is not an abstract pursuit of truth detached from context, but a lived, moral, and communal practice that sustains life. African ontology begins from the premise that reality is relational and dynamic. Existence unfolds within a web of relationships among people, ancestors, nature, and the spiritual world.

African ontology begins from the premise that reality is relational, dynamic, and holistic. Existence unfolds within an interconnected web linking human beings, ancestors, nature, and the spiritual realm. Gyekye (2011) explains that this worldview rejects rigid dualisms, such as mind/body or spirit/matter, and instead understands reality as an integrated whole governed by balance and reciprocity. Ramose (1999) conceptualises this as the circle of life, emphasising becoming rather than static being. Subjectivity is not a barrier to truth but a source of insight, since knowing is always situated within relationships.

Gyekye (2011) explains that this worldview rejects dualism; spirit and matter, individual and community, body and mind form an integrated whole. Reality is therefore both moral and material; its harmony depends on balance and reciprocity. The cosmos is animated by *a vital force, a dynamic energy that links* all forms of life. Ramose (1999) refers to this as the "circle of life", emphasising that being is always in motion, becoming through interdependent relationships. Within this ontology, the visible and invisible realms coexist. Ancestors, deities, and natural elements are integral to human life, making African cosmology inherently spiritual. Wiredu (1998) notes that this focus on *process* rather than static substance leads to a conception of reality as *becoming*, not mere existence. Ontology, in this sense, is practical; it directs human conduct toward maintaining harmony with the totality of life.

From this relational ontology emerges an epistemology of participation. Knowledge is socially produced through interaction, experience, and dialogue rather than privately possessed. Dei (2012) emphasises that learning occurs within the community and environment through observation, storytelling, ritual, and apprenticeship**.** In African epistemology, subjectivity is not treated as a distortion of truth but as a legitimate source of insight, since knowledge is produced through relationships and lived experience rather than

abstract detachment. Crucially, this relationality is anchored strictly within African cosmological, communal, and ancestral frameworks. It is not rooted in European collective memory or Western epistemic traditions but rather engages dialogically from a sovereign African epistemic location. Mbiti (1990) and Gyekye (2011) identify practical wisdom or sagacity as the highest form of knowing, measured by its capacity to sustain harmony and social wellbeing.

Ramose (1999) extends this by asserting that knowledge is justified by its contribution to the enhancement of life. This moral grounding transforms epistemology into an ethical responsibility rather than a neutral act of reasoning. Spirituality functions as an epistemic regulator within this system. Odora Hoppers (2002) explains that spirituality ensures knowledge remains accountable to both human and nonhuman communities, orienting inquiry toward justice, respect, and ecological balance. Intuition, dreams, and ritual communication are recognised as legitimate ways of knowing, broadening epistemology beyond empirical observation. These modes of insight affirm that knowing is a form of participation in a living cosmos guided by moral and spiritual integrity.

The African understanding of truth also reflects this unity. Truth is ethical as well as logical: knowledge that harms or disrupts balance cannot be considered true. For Wiredu (1998), truth is achieved through both correspondence with reality and consensus within the community. It is verified through dialogue and shared experience rather than impersonal experimentation. Gyekye (2011) clarifies that this does not imply relativism but rather *communal rationality*, where truth is sought collectively to preserve moral order. Ramose (1999) adds that deception is not merely an intellectual error, but a moral failure. Objectivity lies in relational integrity, not detachment. Building on the philosophical grounding of African epistemology and ontology, it is important to consider how knowledge manifests in African life. The following section discusses the various forms of African knowledge (holistic, mystical/mythological, and perceptual) that emerge directly from these underlying philosophical principles.

2.4.2 African forms of knowledge

Advocates of AIKS, including Anyanwu (1983), John (2009), Ndubisi (2014), Onyewuenyi (1993), Senghor (1956), and Uduigwomen (2009), argue that Africans possess unique ways of understanding the world. These encompass intuitive, empirical, inferential, rational, traditional, perceptual, oral, mystical, holistic, and common-sense knowledge. Etim (2012) holds that these various forms of knowledge can also be classified as types or sources of

knowledge. Among the range of knowledge types discussed, this study focuses on holistic, mystical/mythological, and perceptual expertise within African epistemology. The focus on these identified types is informed by their interconnected nature and significance within AIKS. Furthermore, scholars such as Ndubisi (2014), John (2009), and Uduigwomen (2009) emphasise the significance of these knowledge forms within African epistemology, considering them deeply meaningful and distinctly African.

Holistic Nature of African Knowledge

African scholars consistently articulate that knowledge within African worldviews is fundamentally holistic and relational. However, they address different aspects of this holism and resist the dualistic separation characteristic of Western epistemology. Ani (2013, p. 306) contends that "there is no such division as rationalism and empiricism, subjectivism and objectivism, secular and the supernatural as reflected in some western-driven dichotomies". Instead, knowledge emerges from the interconnectedness of people, ancestors, land, and cosmos, embedded in history, language, ritual, and everyday practice. However, this emphasis on relationality has sometimes been misinterpreted as ontological confusion, a misconception that Udefi (2009) explicitly refutes. Drawing on Anyanwu (1983, p. 83), Udefi clarifies that while African ontologies recognise a shared vital force permeating all existence, "this does not mean that Africans cannot distinguish themselves from the external world". Trees, mountains, and stones are understood as distinct entities, yet all participate in a common animating energy. Thus, where Ani emphasises the rejection of Western dualisms, Udefi and Anyanwu provide the philosophical precision to show that African holism upholds a dialectic of unity and differentiation: beings are simultaneously interconnected and uniquely constituted, each with its own role in a dynamic, living cosmos.

This philosophical stance may superficially resemble Tempels' (1959) depiction of African ontology as a "web of forces". However, such a comparison requires critical caution. Tempels, a Belgian missionary, interpreted African thought through a colonial and theological lens, framing it as ontologically deficient and in need of Christian completion. His account, though attentive to interdependence, ultimately exoticised African knowledge within a civilisational hierarchy. In contrast, African scholars articulate holism from within endogenous frameworks, grounded in linguistic specificity, communal validation, and lived experience, without recourse to external epistemic arbitration.

Central to this worldview is the concept of lifeforce, also termed vital force or cosmological energy, a foundational principle across many African ontologies. Lifeforce denotes the animating energy that flows through God, ancestral spirits, humans, animals, plants, and minerals, binding them into a single, interdependent web of being (Karangi, 2019; Welsh-Asante, 1993). As Okoro (2019, p. 7) affirms, "in holism, Africans maintain a unitary vision of reality, underline the common source of all lives, and uphold the interdependence of all within the planetary system". This non-dualistic cosmology rejects the separation of spiritual and material realms: neither exists in isolation (Osimiri, 2016, p. 39). The metaphor of the spider's web, "no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network" (Tempels, 1959, p. 41), captures this interconnectivity. However, where Tempels saw incompleteness, African philosophy sees coherence: a unified reality in which knowing is not detached observation, but participation in a relational whole.

Perceptual Knowledge

In many African epistemological traditions, perceptual knowledge – knowledge gained through the senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell – is regarded as a primary and credible mode of knowing. Aquino and Gavrilyuk (2022) define perceptual knowledge as knowledge acquired directly through sensory experience. This view resonates with African understandings expressed in idioms such as the Igbo phrase "afun'anya e kwere" ("to see is to believe"). As Ejikemeuwa (2014, p. 34) explains, "The African person holds that knowledge is gained through what we see, hear, touch, taste or smell… The African finds it very difficult to doubt what he has witnessed with his empirical senses". Examples such as "Mr John is in the class" or "Snow is falling now" fall squarely within this domain: knowledge here is rooted in direct, first-hand observation and eyewitness experience. In this framework, knowing is not merely cognitive but experiential: it requires physical presence and active engagement with unfolding events, rather than reliance on abstract reasoning or second-hand accounts.

However, perceptual knowledge is not accepted uncritically as absolute truth. Instead, it is subject to communal validation processes. John (2009, p. 166) clarifies that while perceptual knowledge "comes to a man through the various senses of the body", it "must be tested through experiments" before it is accepted as reliable knowledge. This does not necessarily imply laboratory-style experimentation, but rather practical verification through repeated observation, consistency with communal experience, or cross-referencing with other witnesses. Nwosimiri (2019) reinforces this point, arguing that any robust African

epistemology must include realistic, contextually appropriate methods for testing knowledge claims. In practice, Ejikemeuwa (2014, p. 34) observes that when a perceptual claim is disputed, verification often relies on calling an eyewitness, "a third party", whose testimony is generally accepted as truthful. Should doubt persist, oathtaking may serve as the ultimate means of adjudication, invoking spiritual accountability to affirm truthfulness.

This approach reflects a broader epistemological principle: truth is not assessed by universal, decontextualised criteria, but by how knowledge functions within a "specific form of life". Winch's (1988, p. 55) philosophical insight is instructive here: "Whether a statement is true or false will depend on what it means… how it functions as part of the form of life it belongs to. Truth claims, therefore, cannot be judged by external standards alien to their cultural and epistemic context. Within African worldviews, perceptual knowledge gains legitimacy not through Cartesian certainty, but through its embeddedness in relational, experiential, and spiritually accountable practices of verification.

Myth, Mystical Experience, and Divination

In African epistemologies, mystical experience constitutes a legitimate and profound mode of knowing. Knowledge is not confined to sensory or rational faculties but may be directly imparted by spiritual agents – particularly God and the ancestors – through dreams, visions, or other revelatory encounters. Tempels (1959) observes that, in African thought, the ultimate source of knowledge and wisdom is divine; humans receive epistemic authority through their relational bond with the sacred. Similarly, Wiredu (1998), Mbiti (1990), and Ani (2013) affirm that divine beings actively participate in human knowing, communicating guidance, warnings, or truths through non-ordinary experiences. Such knowledge is not arbitrary but arises within a moral and cosmological order that binds the living, the ancestral, and the spiritual realms.

Because mystical experiences are often symbolic, ambiguous, or encoded, they require interpretation. This is where divination functions as a critical epistemic practice. Peek (2019, p. 171) describes divination as "a standardised process deriving from a learned discipline based on an extensive body of knowledge". Far from being mere superstition, it is a structured methodology for diagnosing and addressing the hidden causes of misfortune, illness, or social rupture. Diviners, as trained mediators, interpret signs – whether through casting bones, reading shells, or consulting oracles – not by personal whim but through rigorous apprenticeship and communal validation. Their role often includes interceding

between the human and spiritual worlds to restore balance (Wiredu, 1998; Mbiti, 1990). While John (2009, p. 168) notes a superficial similarity between African divination and Western "supernaturalism", this comparison overlooks divination's embeddedness in African cosmology as a systematic, communal, and morally accountable knowledge practice.

To communicate and transmit these experiences and interpretations across generations, African societies rely on myth not as fanciful fiction, but as a symbolic language that conveys existential and cosmological truths. Ruch (1984, p. 35) defines myth as "a complex set of signs, both verbal and gestural, which aim at accounting for some of the most fundamental problems of life and existence". Myths bypass abstract theorisation and speak holistically to intellect, emotion, body, and spirit about origins, death, evil, providence, and humanity's place in the cosmos (Ani, 2013, p. 311). In this sense, myth "negotiates between material and supernatural existence", satisfying both physical and spiritual dimensions of the human quest to know. Importantly, Ani (2013) cautions against equating "unscientific" with "inferior": Western science itself produces origin narratives (e.g., the Big Bang) that function mythically in their attempt to explain ultimate realities. Thus, myth is not opposed to knowledge but constitutes a distinct epistemic mode – one that offers integrated, relational, and culturally resonant ways of understanding the world.

2.4.3 Oral tradition as a primary mode of knowledge transmission in African epistemologies

Oral tradition plays a significant role in many African forms of knowledge. Adedeji (1971, p. 135) refers to oral tradition as a "complex corpus of verbal or spoken art created as a means of recalling the past and based on the ideas, beliefs, symbols, assumptions, attitudes and sentiments of people". It includes storytelling, riddles, songs and many other forms of oral expression. According to Falola (2022), oral tradition is central to AIKS, serving as the primary means of knowledge transmission while also preserving and transmitting beliefs and values. More than just a method of communication, oral tradition embodies the essence of African cosmology and way of life, shaping identity, fostering communal bonds, and ensuring the continuity of AIKS (Machinga, 2019; Iheanacho, 2021).

Byrskog (2022) argues that oral tradition is a vital aspect of African cultures precisely because it embodies a community's customs, history, and beliefs. He notes that through oral tradition, individuals come to learn and understand their place, history, and roles in the community. Consequently, oral tradition serves to preserve cultural heritage, reinforce the

shared identity of a people, and promote social cohesion. It also enhances critical thinking, creativity, and innovation (Hosen et al., 2020).

Within African culture, oral tradition is not just a programmed, one-way method of transmitting information but a vigorous and interactive process that necessitates the sharing of ideas and the creation of knowledge (Hosen et al., 2020). Duranti (1993) notes that in ancient societies, memory was primarily oral, and its custodians, such as elders, griots, and ritual specialists, were entrusted with preserving collective knowledge. These keepers of memory memorised rules, contracts, genealogies, and historical narratives, and transmitted them by reciting to younger members of the community. Through this practice, knowledge was passed from rulers to their subjects, from parents to children, and across generations, with each memory holder playing a vital role in sustaining social continuity.

Importantly, this transmission is not mechanical repetition; it is a dynamic process in which knowledge is also transformed, as Thao (2006, p. 14) asserts when he states that the practice of "oral tradition transforms knowledge through performance, repetition and memorisation of oral performances such as poetry, songs, stories, chants, etc.". Each enactment adapts meaning to new contexts, audiences, and needs. In the same light, Scheub (1985, p. 1) underscores this generative capacity, noting that "African oral tradition distils the essence of human experiences, shaping them into memorable, readily retrievable images of broad applicability with an extraordinary potential for eliciting emotional responses…". Thus, oral tradition serves not only to preserve but to reinterpret and renew knowledge across time. Despite the embedded value of oral tradition, scholars such as Stangor and Walinga (2019) have questioned its accuracy due to its reliance on human memories, which are susceptible to errors and distortions, thereby affecting the accuracy of the stories or information. They further assert that:

> Our memories are not perfect. They fail in part due to our inadequate encoding and storage, and in part due to our inability to retrieve stored information accurately. … memory is also influenced by the setting in which it occurs, by the events that occur to us after we have experienced an event, and by the cognitive processes that we use to help us remember. Although our cognition allows us to attend to, rehearse, and organise information, cognition may also lead to distortions and errors in our judgments and our behaviours. (p. 9)

Despite the fallibility of human memory, as highlighted by Stangor and Walinga (2019), oral tradition remains a dynamic and multifaceted pillar of African culture. Although oral tradition represents one of the most enduring and authoritative sources of African knowledge, its continuity was profoundly disrupted by the imposition of colonial rule. Colonialism did not merely introduce new political and economic structures; it sought to replace African epistemic traditions, including oral knowledge, with Western modes of thought. To understand the scale of this disruption, the next section examines colonialism and coloniality as epistemic projects that reconfigured African ways of knowing.

2.5 Colonialism and Coloniality

Before the division of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, European powers had already laid the ideological foundation for colonial domination. They propagated the notion of Africa as a "heart of darkness", depicting its inhabitants as primitive, uncivilised, and devoid of culture, thereby justifying colonial intervention (Oliver & Oliver, 2017). This narrative, as Mpofu (2013) argues, was not innocent but a deliberate imperial strategy aimed at reshaping African history to align with Western colonial objectives. The formal colonisation of Africa reached its peak during the Berlin Conference, where European nations convened to partition and claim African territories (Craven, 2015; Carmody, 2017).

However, it is essential to recognise that colonial justifications were neither uniform nor universally applied. While concepts such as *terra nullius* (land belonging to no one) and terra incognita (unknown land) were invoked in some contexts to legitimise dispossession (Muller, 2013; Toromoreno, 2015), scholars like Guy (2009) have shown that in places such as Natal, colonisers did not claim the land was empty in an absolute sense; rather, they argued it had been depopulated through internecine conflict thus rendering it "available" for settlement. This nuance matters, as it reveals colonialism's adaptable rhetoric rather than a single, static myth. Moreover, as Manji (2005) argues, even the category "African" was itself a colonial construct, forged to homogenise diverse societies into a governable and inferiorised mass, an epistemic move that obscured precolonial identities and sovereignties.

According to Ouma (2025), the colonial process in Africa had multiple, intersecting impacts: economic, physical, cultural, and most enduringly, ideological. Economically, it led to the systematic extraction of resources and the restructuring of indigenous economies to serve the needs of European metropolitan areas. Physically, it displaced populations and imposed

foreign systems of governance. However, the most profound and lasting consequence of colonialism lies in its ideological project: the reordering of African consciousness and knowledge systems to conform to Eurocentric worldviews.

From another perspective, scholars such as Boahene (1985), Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012), and Rodney (2018) argue that African colonisation was driven by the continent's vast natural resources and the imperial ambition to exploit what Europeans considered underdeveloped economies. Mazrui (1963, p. 663) identifies three main motives for colonisation: the scientific exploration of the "Dark Continent", European ethnocentrism and racism underpinned by Western Christianity, and economic exploitation. Higgs (2011, p. 2) captures the ideological intent of colonialism, stating:

> Colonialism in Africa provided the framework for the organised subjugation of the cultural, scientific and economic life of many on the African continent. This subjugation impacted the African people's way of seeing and acting in the world. In fact, African identity, to all intents and purposes, became an inverted mirror of Western Eurocentric identity. This state of affairs gave birth to numerous attempts to reassert distinctively African ways of thinking and of relating to the world and is expressed in more recent days in the call for an African Renaissance" (p. 2)

This highlights that beyond economic exploitation, colonialism operated as an ideological system, one that sought to redefine African identity through a Eurocentric lens. Similarly, Césaire (1995, p. 55) reflects on the cultural and psychological devastation wrought by colonisation:

> I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out … I am talking about millions of (women and) men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life from life, from the dance, from wisdom. I am talking about millions of (women and) men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkies. I am talking about natural economies that have been destroyed, crops destroyed, malnutrition permanently introduced, agricultural development oriented solely toward the benefit of the metropolitan countries, the looting of raw materials.

Césaire's lament captures the ideological violence of colonialism, its project of cultural erasure, and the internalisation of inferiority. Colonisation was not limited to physical domination; it also sought to reconstruct African self-perception. The colonial narrative thus aimed to position Africa as a space of absolute primitivism and intellectual backwardness, a "negative other" lacking philosophical depth or self-awareness (Itandala, 2001; Memmi, 1963). Mpofu (2013) reinforces this view, describing colonialism as an all-encompassing force that inflicted injuries and affected all aspects of existence across various spheres of life, effectively functioning as a "prohibitive curse".

Colonial violence was certainly immense; however, African agency was never extinguished. Communities preserved languages, rituals, healing practices, and governance systems in both overt and covert ways, which Cooper and Stoler (1997) describe as everyday forms of resistance that sustained cultural integrity beneath the surface of colonial rule. The continent-wide liberation struggles of the mid-20th century, and the ongoing reclamation of Indigenous Knowledge today, demonstrate that colonialism, while deeply destructive, was never total. As Mbembe (2001) argues, African subjects were never passive recipients of colonial power but continually reinterpreted, subverted, and exceeded its logic. Similarly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) shows that African knowledge systems persisted through what he calls "epistemic resilience" – a quiet but persistent refusal to surrender intellectual sovereignty. The very existence of Afrocentric scholarship (Asante, 2000; Dei, 2012) and epistemic recentering projects like this one testifies to the resilience and continuity of African ways of knowing.

Nevertheless, once colonialism established the initial structures of domination, its underlying logic persisted beyond formal independence. This ongoing system of control, referred to as coloniality, continued to shape African identities, knowledge, and institutional life long after political decolonisation. The next subsection, therefore, explores coloniality as the enduring continuation of colonial ideology.

2.5.1 Coloniality as the continuation of colonial ideology

Although colonialism, as a formal system of political domination, concluded with the granting of independence to African states, its ideological and epistemic architectures did not thereby cease to operate. Instead, they reconstituted themselves within the modern world order as what Aníbal Quijano (2000) designates coloniality: the enduring structural logic that undergirds modernity and continues to reproduce global hierarchies of race, knowledge, and being. Coloniality is not a vestige of empire but an active, constitutive dimension of

contemporary globality. As Maldonado Torres (2007) elucidates, it comprises the invisible power structures that maintain colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after direct colonialism has ended. This logic manifests through what Quijano (2000), Mignolo (2017), and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) collectively term the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, a tripartite framework through which Eurocentric norms are institutionalised in education, governance, knowledge production, and cultural representation.

Within this framework, the epistemic dimension is particularly consequential. Coloniality operates by universalising Western knowledge as objective, scientific, and neutral, while relegating AIKS to the margins as anecdotal, mystical, or premodern, as discussed earlier in this chapter. This hierarchical ordering persists not through overt coercion but through institutional practices, citation economies, and curricular canons that naturalise Western epistemology as the global standard. As Quijano (2007) contends, dismantling this colonial matrix of power demands not merely political transformation but an epistemic revolution – one that recognises multiple ways of knowing as equally valid.

It is within this context that intellectual projects such as Afrocentrism acquire their critical significance. Moving beyond reactive critique, Afrocentrism reclaims Africa as an autonomous epistemic site and repositions African cosmologies, histories, and knowledge practices at the centre of scholarly inquiry (Asante, 2017; Chukwuokolo, 2009). This stance directly challenges the colonial epistemic binary elaborated in the works of Bhabha (2012), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), and Said (1985), which constructs the West as the locus of rationality and universality, and Africa as the domain of irrationality and particularity. Bhabha's (2012) concepts of mimicry and hybridity further reveal the instability of this binary, demonstrating how colonial subjects continually disrupted and exceeded the categories imposed upon them.

Fanon (1963) offers a searing account of colonialism's epistemic violence:

> Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of a devaluing precolonial history takes on a dialectical significance today. (p. 170)

However, Fanon's broader corpus affirms that resistance is the necessary counterpart to domination – a dialectical force that refuses epistemic erasure. Likewise, Chinweizu (1985) calls for comprehensive cultural decolonisation:

> The cultural task at hand is to end all foreign domination of African culture, to destroy all encrustations of colonial and enslaved person mentality systematically… This process must take place in all spheres of African life – in government, industry, family and social life, education, city planning, architecture, arts, entertainment, etc. (p. 13)

This enduring struggle underscores that coloniality, while pervasive, is not absolute. Its persistence demands vigilant critique and creative reclamation. Thus, while colonialism has concluded as a historical epoch of direct imperial rule, coloniality endures as its ideological afterlife, determining what is recognised as valid knowledge, who is authorised as a knower, and which worldviews are accorded legitimacy. Recognising this distinction is essential to the Afrocentric project: not as an exercise in nostalgic retrieval, but as a forward-looking reassertion of African epistemic agency.

The following subsection, therefore, examines how colonial ideology specifically targeted African ways of knowing, highlighting the resilience, adaptation, and ongoing relevance of AIKS in sustaining decolonial praxis.

2.5.2 The epistemic influence of colonialism

While colonial knowledge policies varied across imperial powers, the British emphasised English-language administration and a "racial hierarchy", and the French promoted linguistic and cultural assimilation rooted in "cultural arrogance" (Mazrui, 1978, p. 11). Nevertheless, they converged in one critical aim: the systematic displacement of African epistemologies. As Kamerkar (2001) and Labé, Dembélé, and Bruneforth (2013) observe, fluency in colonial languages was not merely a practical skill but a prerequisite for access to "legitimate" knowledge itself. This linguistic gatekeeping ensured that Western frameworks of reason, science, and governance were positioned as universal, while Indigenous modes of knowing were rendered invisible or inferior. Missionary educators, representing diverse denominations and colonial states, played a pivotal role in this epistemic reordering. Abraham (2020) notes that the promise of "civilisation and salvation" embedded in colonial schooling attracted early African elites, teachers, nurses, and evangelists who became both beneficiaries and, often unwittingly, agents of epistemic transformation. In this process, African cosmologies, oral traditions, and healing systems were recast as superstition, while European curricula were naturalised as neutral and progressive.

This dynamic reflects what Wagoner (2003) identifies as the core function of colonial knowledge: not merely information, but a technology of domination. Colonial knowledge, in

this sense, refers to the ensemble of discourses, classifications, and institutional practices that enabled colonisers to know, categorise, and control the colonised world. Crucially, Wagoner's insight helps clarify that colonial knowledge was never just about Africa; it was a performative force that produced Africa as an object of knowledge within a Eurocentric epistemic order. This process did not simply suppress Indigenous Knowledge Systems; it actively redefined them as irrational, unscientific, and unworthy of preservation. The consequences were profound and enduring. By institutionalising Western epistemology in education, law, science, and administration (Merry, 1991), colonialism committed what Santos (2014) later termed epistemicide – the systematic erasure of alternative ways of knowing. African knowledge was not merely marginalised; it was epistemologically discredited, its practitioners excluded from authoritative roles, and its transmission disrupted across generations.

However, as Section 2.5 has already established, this project was never completed. African communities preserved, adapted, and resisted epistemic erasure through clandestine practices, oral transmission, and later, organised intellectual movements. Thus, the legacy of colonial knowledge is not merely historical but structural: it continues to shape what counts as valid knowledge in African universities, policy arenas, and research institutions. The task of epistemic decolonisation, therefore, requires more than recovery; it demands the recentering of AIKS as self-validating, dynamic, and epistemologically sovereign traditions. The following section examines how AIKS, despite centuries of delegitimisation, embody holistic, relational, and life-sustaining forms of knowing that offer vital alternatives to colonial epistemic hierarchies.

2.6 The Enduring Influence of Coloniality on African Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Unlike colonialism, which operated through direct political control, coloniality persists through education systems, research institutions, development policies, and global markets, reproducing epistemic asymmetry in the postcolonial era. This section examines four interrelated mechanisms through which this marginalisation is sustained: the capitalist reconfiguration of communal ethics, the dual dynamic of epistemic exclusion and commodification, the institutional disruption of intergenerational transmission, and the imposition of Western research paradigms. African communities and scholars actively engage

with these forces through adaptive knowledge practices, policy advocacy, and epistemic recentering, affirming the dynamic, living character of AIKS.

2.6.1 The capitalist reconfiguration of communal ethics

Communalism functions as a foundational epistemic and ontological principle in many AIKS, structuring knowledge production, transmission, and validation through reciprocity, collective responsibility, and shared stewardship of land, culture, and well-being. Wane (2009) observes that Indigenous social formations "act together to protect their resources, preserve their identities, and provide moral and physical support to those needing it" (p. 40). Within this framework, knowledge is not abstracted from ethical praxis; its legitimacy emerges from its capacity to sustain harmony among people, ancestors, the natural world, and spiritual forces (Ntseane, 2011; Dei, 2012).

The expansion of neoliberal capitalism has reconfigured these communal ethics by transforming the material and social conditions that sustain them. Urban migration, driven by the decline of agrarian livelihoods and the concentration of wage-based employment in cities, has altered household structures and kinship dynamics across much of the continent (Etta, Awasum, & Nkuo, 2016). Mkandawire (2015) notes that structural adjustment policies and market liberalisation have accelerated the commodification of land, labour, and time, shifting social relations from mutual obligation toward transactional exchange. These changes affect the rhythms of communal life: seasonal rituals, long-term apprenticeships, and intergenerational dialogue require sustained copresence and shared temporal commitment – conditions that are increasingly difficult to maintain under precarious urban economies.

Rather than signalling decline, however, these shifts have catalysed innovative forms of communal reorganisation. Across urban and periurban contexts, communities are cultivating adaptive infrastructures that sustain relational ethics within contemporary constraints. Stokvels (rotating savings clubs) function not only as financial cooperatives but as spaces for moral instruction, conflict resolution, and cultural reaffirmation (Adams & Njong, 2020). Similarly, healer collectives in South Africa and Nigeria maintain ethical codes, apprenticeship standards, and communal accountability mechanisms that preserve epistemic integrity despite state marginalisation (Mokgobi, 2014; Okeke, 2021). These practices embody what Dei (2012) terms epistemic resilience – the creative, ongoing renewal of Indigenous knowledge systems through contextually grounded innovation.

2.6.2 The reproduction of coloniality through Western educational models

Western educational models reproduce coloniality in African knowledge landscapes by institutionalising an epistemic order that centres European ways of knowing as universal and scientific. Murove (2018) argues that the structure, content, and pedagogy of African education systems – largely inherited from colonial frameworks exclude Indigenous cosmologies, languages, and methods of inquiry from spaces of legitimate knowledge production. This arrangement is actively sustained through curricula, assessment standards, and institutional cultures that privilege abstraction, individualism, and detachment as markers of intellectual rigour, thereby reinforcing what Quijano (2007) identifies as the colonial matrix of power.

In higher education, this dynamic is particularly pronounced. Sehoole and de Wit (2014) observe that university knowledge domains, ranging from philosophy to the sciences, are overwhelmingly structured around Western canons, leaving little room for AIKS as coequal epistemologies. In health sciences, for instance, biomedical paradigms dominate teaching and research, framing traditional healing as unscientific or even dangerous, despite its widespread use and cultural embeddedness (OwusuAnsah & Mji, 2013). Mokgobi (2012) notes that this exclusion overlooks the holistic, relational, and preventive dimensions of African healing practices, which integrate physical, spiritual, and communal wellbeing in ways that Western biomedicine often neglects.

African scholars and institutions are actively advancing alternatives to this epistemic monoculture. The adoption of South Africa's Traditional Health Practitioners Act (2007) represents a significant step toward institutional recognition of AIKS, creating formal pathways for collaboration between traditional and biomedical practitioners (Naidu, Nxumalo, & Mchunu, 2022). At the pedagogical level, Afrocentric curriculum design and Indigenous research methodologies integrate ancestral knowledge, oral tradition, and communal validation into academic practice (Ezeanya Esiobu, 2019; Akena, 2012). Universities in Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya have also incorporated local languages and Indigenous ecological knowledge into environmental and agricultural programmes, demonstrating that epistemic pluralism is both viable and generative (Assié Lumumba, 2022).

2.6.3 Institutional elder care and the disruption of oral knowledge transmission

Oral transmission remains a central mechanism for sustaining AIKS, relying on ongoing, contextual interaction between elders and younger generations in shared community spaces. McIlwaine and Whiffin (2001) observe that this process unfolds not through formal lectures but through daily cohabitation, collective rituals, apprenticeships, and storytelling – practices that embed knowledge in lived experience and relational continuity. The enduring Akan proverb, "When an elder dies, a library burns", reflects the understanding that elders function as living archives of history, ethics, healing, and cosmology.

The expansion of institutional elder care – commonly referred to as "old age homes" – has reconfigured these relational spaces. Chikovore (2010) notes that when elders reside in facilities separated from kin and community, the informal, embodied exchanges essential to oral transmission are significantly diminished. This spatial separation disrupts the intergenerational copresence required for long-term mentorship in domains such as herbal medicine, conflict resolution, agricultural cycles, and spiritual practice. Mugumbate and Nyamnjoh (2020) further argue that urban migration and the rise of nuclear households compound this fragmentation, as youth spend less time in environments where Indigenous knowledge is enacted and validated.

In response, communities are creating adaptive infrastructures to sustain intergenerational dialogue. Ratele (2022) documents how school-based heritage programmes in South Africa invite elders to co-facilitate lessons on local history and language, effectively reintegrating oral transmission into formal education. Similarly, Chitando and Chitando (2022) highlight community radio initiatives and digital storytelling projects in Zimbabwe and Kenya that record elders' narratives in local languages, ensuring accessibility for geographically dispersed youth. These efforts demonstrate that oral transmission is not bound to a fixed social form but thrives wherever intentional relational spaces are cultivated.

2.6.4 The politics of knowledge documentation and epistemic extractivism

Documentation of AIKS is often framed as a technical act of preservation. It is a deeply political practice shaped by questions of power, value, and control. Masoga (2004) notes that documentation efforts have historically concentrated on knowledge with immediate economic utility – particularly knowledge of medicinal plants while neglecting cosmological, ethical,

and ritual dimensions that give this knowledge its coherence and meaning. This selective focus reflects a broader pattern: AIKS is not uniformly ignored but strategically extracted when it serves external interests. Pharmaceutical researchers, for instance, routinely document plant-based remedies to isolate and patent bioactive compounds – a practice Mgbeoji (2006) identifies as bioprospecting. Bioprospecting, in its neutral sense, refers to the systematic search for commercially valuable biological resources and associated Indigenous knowledge. However, when this extraction occurs without informed consent, without recognition of Indigenous intellectual contribution, and without equitable benefit-sharing, it constitutes biopiracy: the appropriation and looting of Indigenous knowledge through Western intellectual property regimes (Shiva, 1997). Shiva (1997) demonstrates how multinational corporations patent seeds, medicinal plants, and agricultural practices that African and South Asian communities have developed and refined over centuries, converting collectively held knowledge into privately owned commodities.

Mgbeoji (2006) extends this critique specifically to the African context, showing how the patenting of Indigenous medicinal knowledge – such as the hoodia plant used by the San people – exemplifies how biopiracy operates as a continuation of colonial extraction under the guise of scientific innovation. In this process, the relational, spiritual, and communal contexts that sustain healing knowledge are discarded, reducing complex epistemologies to decontextualised data points. AIKS are thus not merely marginalised or dismissed; they are appropriated and looted through biopiracy, stripped of their epistemic integrity, and reincorporated into Western knowledge economies without acknowledgement or reciprocity.. Similarly, cultural expressions such as dance, ritual, and festival are extensively documented and promoted, but primarily as marketable assets within global tourism economies (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). Here, documentation serves neoliberal development agendas that treat culture as a “comparative advantage” rather than as a living epistemology.

Rather than calling for more documentation, African scholars and communities are redefining how knowledge is recorded and stewarded. Kaya and Seleti (2014) advocate for participatory approaches in which elders, healers, and youth cocreate archives that capture not only “what is known” but also “how it is validated”, “who is authorised to share it”, and “what obligations it entails”. Dei (2008) further argues that authentic preservation must be rooted in local ontologies, ensuring that documentation honours the ancestral, historical, and communal embeddedness of knowledge. These initiatives affirm that knowledge endures

through relational continuity and that ethical documentation supports, but never replaces, that living transmission.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive review of the conceptual, philosophical, and historical debates surrounding Indigenous Knowledge Systems, with a particular focus on AIKS. The literature demonstrates that although substantial scholarship exists on Indigenous knowledge globally, a discernible gap remains regarding explicitly Afrocentric analyses of how African communities understand, produce, and transmit knowledge. This gap, especially in relation to community-specific contexts such as Edendale, highlights the need for studies that foreground African epistemic agency and interpret Indigenous knowledge within African ontological and cultural frameworks.

Through its examination of knowledge as contextually dependent, the chapter highlighted the limitations of Eurocentric universalism and the importance of relational, lived, and community-grounded epistemologies in African contexts. It then explored Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge Systems as interconnected categories encompassing both the content of knowledge and the frameworks through which it is generated and validated. The discussion of AIKS further demonstrated the richness and dynamism of African epistemologies, revealing their ethical grounding, spiritual depth, and resilience across generations.

In reviewing the literature on colonialism and coloniality, the chapter also showed how African knowledge was systematically delegitimised through missionary education, political domination, and epistemic restructuring. Despite these disruptions, AIKS endured through resistance, adaptation, and the continued significance of communal life. The chapter concluded by identifying contemporary challenges affecting the preservation and transmission of Indigenous knowledge, including the erosion of communalism, the dominance of Western educational paradigms, shifts in intergenerational relations, and persistent epistemological and methodological constraints. While scholars have robustly theorised AIKS as holistic, relational, and resilient, few studies apply an Afrocentric learning theory to analyse how communities navigate epistemic rupture in historically hybrid spaces, such as mission-founded settlements. Moreover, there is limited empirical work that centres Edendale or similar peri-urban South African communities as sites where AIKS persist not

through cultural purity, but through dynamic processes of negotiation, syncretism, and reclamation. This study addresses that gap by operationalising Afrocentricity as a learning theory grounded in the triad of learning, unlearning, and relearning – an analytical framework absent in current literature on Edendale's knowledge history.

Overall, this literature review has established the intellectual foundation of the study by clarifying the conceptual terrain, identifying gaps in existing scholarship, and illuminating why an Afrocentric approach is critical for understanding African Indigenous knowledge in the Edendale community. The next chapter builds directly on this foundation by providing a historical account of Edendale, drawing on diverse published sources to trace its development, sociocultural significance, and the historical conditions that shaped knowledge production within the community.

Historical Account of Edendale

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the historical processes that shaped the emergence of Edendale and the structural forces that sought to regulate, contain, and ultimately undermine its distinctive position within South Africa's colonial and apartheid orders. Rather than treating Edendale as an isolated historical case, the chapter situates its development within the broader political, legal, social, and epistemic transformations that unfolded in Natal from the early nineteenth century to the end of apartheid. The discussion proceeds chronologically, beginning with the Indigenous political organisation and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) that characterised precolonial Natal. It then examines the disruptive effects of warfare, missionary activity, and British annexation, before analysing the establishment of Edendale in 1851 as an experiment in African Christian landownership and autonomy. The chapter concludes by examining how successive colonial and apartheid policies systematically constrained this autonomy through discriminatory land legislation, racialised governance, and spatial segregation.

This historical reconstruction extends beyond a descriptive account of events to offer a critical engagement with competing interpretations of Natal's past. It examines how colonial, liberal-revisionist, Marxist, and postcolonial historiographies have interpreted African agency, missionary influence, and state power differently. While these traditions have made significant contributions to understanding Natal's history, they have paid limited attention to AIKS as legitimate epistemological frameworks through which African communities understood land, governance, social organisation, and identity. Responding to this historiographical gap, the chapter adopts an Afrocentric perspective that centres African knowledge systems as both historical realities and analytical frameworks. As established in Chapter Two, colonialism functioned not only through military conquest and political domination but also through the imposition of Western epistemologies that marginalised and delegitimised Indigenous ways of knowing. Against this backdrop, the chapter examines Edendale as a site where colonial knowledge systems intersected with, challenged, and were contested by African epistemologies.

To facilitate a more nuanced analysis of these historical processes, this chapter distinguishes between six interrelated but conceptually distinct epistemic processes that characterised the colonial encounter and its aftermath in Edendale. Although these processes often overlapped, they represent different mechanisms through which colonialism reshaped African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS). Epistemic disruption refers to the initial rupture in Indigenous knowledge systems, brought about through colonial violence, land dispossession, and the breakdown of intergenerational knowledge transmission (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Whereas disruption marks the point of fracture, epistemic transformation captures the longer-term reconfiguration of knowledge systems, social relations, and cultural practices as colonial structures became normalised over time (Quijano, 2000). Transformation, therefore, extends beyond the initial disruption to describe the enduring reshaping of Indigenous lifeworlds under coloniality.

Unlike these processes, which emphasise rupture and restructuring, epistemic hybridity highlights the emergence of new, syncretic forms of knowledge through the interaction of Indigenous and Western epistemologies, often reflecting pragmatic adaptations rather than wholesale acceptance of colonial worldviews (Mignolo, 2017). Epistemic negotiation shifts the analytical focus from the outcomes of colonial domination to African agency, emphasising the strategic ways individuals and communities selectively engaged with competing knowledge systems to preserve cultural continuity, secure access to resources, or navigate colonial constraints (Meintjes, 2020).

By contrast, epistemic appropriation centres the actions of colonial institutions, referring to the extraction, decontextualisation, and incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into Western epistemic frameworks through practices such as missionary ethnography, colonial documentation, and bioprospecting, without recognition, reciprocity, or benefit to Indigenous knowledge holders (Mgbeoji, 2006). While appropriation exploits Indigenous knowledge, epistemicide represents the most extreme expression of colonial epistemic domination: the systematic destruction and delegitimisation of Indigenous and other non-Western knowledge systems, rendering them inferior, invisible, or expendable within the colonial matrix of power (Santos, 2014). Distinguishing these concepts enables the chapter to analyse colonialism not as a single process of Indigenous dispossession but as a series of interconnected epistemic dynamics through which AIKS were fractured, reconfigured, adapted, exploited, contested, and, in some instances, deliberately targeted for elimination.

By tracing Edendale's historical trajectory across more than a century, this chapter demonstrates that its marginalisation was neither incidental nor inevitable. Rather, it emerged from a colonial and apartheid order that regarded African autonomy as fundamentally incompatible with its racial, political, and epistemic project, even when African communities embraced the very ideals of private property, Christianity, and industriousness that colonial authorities professed to value. In establishing this historical context, the chapter provides the foundation for the study's central argument: that the contemporary processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning observed in Edendale are deeply rooted in this enduring history of epistemic disruption, contestation, adaptation, and resilience.

3.2 The Contested Territory: Natal before 1850 – Historiographical Foundation

To situate the emergence of Edendale within its proper historical terrain, it is essential first to reconstruct the political, ecological, and epistemic landscape of Natal before European settlement solidified into colonial rule. In the early nineteenth century, “Natal” denoted a coastal region bounded by the Indian Ocean to the east, the Thukela (Tugela) River to the north, the uMzimkhulu River to the south, and the Drakensberg escarpment to the west (Guy, 2009; Marks, 1967). Crucially, Natal was not a unified polity but a dynamic mosaic of African chiefdoms, San hunter-gatherer communities, and, increasingly after the 1820s, European traders, missionaries, and settlers. The British annexation in 1843 would later impose administrative coherence; however, prior to this, sovereignty remained fluid, negotiated through alliances, mobility, and ritual authority rather than territorial borders (Guy, 2009; Maylam, 1986).

3.2.1 Precolonial foundations and Indigenous epistemologies in Natal

Long before European arrival, the region sustained complex Nguni-speaking societies, including the Lala, Mbo, and Ntungwa, whose social organisation was deeply attuned to ecological cycles (Huffman, 2004; Marks, 1967). Archaeological and oral evidence confirms the presence of San from at least the thirteenth century, while linguistic and environmental data trace Nguni migrations southward over centuries, shaped by drought, resource availability, and social innovation (Huffman, 2004; Schlebusch et al., 2016). By the 1700s, these communities had developed what Guy (2009) refers to as an animate mode of production. Wealth was measured not in land ownership but in people and livestock, with

polygynous homesteads serving as units of production anchored in free labour (women in cultivation, men in herding). Crucially, land was not considered alienable property but a relational domain held in trust across generations by the living, their ancestors, and the yet-unborn (Cousins & Hall, 2011). This relational understanding of land constituted an epistemic orientation in which land was embedded within social, spiritual, and moral obligations rather than commodified ownership. As discussed in Chapter Two, this orientation formed part of a broader AIKS that integrated ecological stewardship, spiritual accountability, and communal ethics. Healing, governance, and land management were interwoven through the roles of *inyanga* (herbalists) and *izangoma* (diviners), who maintained balance between human and non-human realms (Berkes, 1993; Rogerson, 2017). Such systems stood in stark epistemological contrast to the colonial legal order that would later impose surveyed boundaries, title deeds, and individual ownership mechanisms that, as Mignolo (2007) argues, enacted epistemicide by rendering Indigenous ways of knowing illegitimate. However, the historical reality of these Indigenous systems has been obscured by competing historiographical narratives, which the following section critically examines to expose how colonial myths were constructed and subsequently challenged.

3.2.2 Historiographical contestations: From colonial myth to decolonial critique

Scholarly interpretations of this period reveal historiographical divides. Early colonial accounts exemplified by Bryant (1929) cast precolonial Natal as a zone of chaos, legitimising dispossession by depicting African societies as inherently violent and unstable. This narrative crystallised around the Mfecane (or Difaqane), a term long used to describe early nineteenth-century upheaval. Colonial and apartheid-era historians attributed this turmoil to Shaka Zulu's militarism, framing him as a despotic figure whose "reign of terror" emptied the land (Krige, 1936). This view was first challenged by liberal revisionists, such as Omer-Cooper (1966), who reinterprets the Mfecane as a period of revolutionary state formation driven by structural pressures, including population growth following the introduction of maize, competition over Delagoa Bay trade routes, and ecological stress. Radical and postcolonial historians such as Shula Marks (1967), Charles van Onselen (1982), Tim Keegan (1982), and John Wright (1989) played a decisive role in dismantling earlier interpretations of the Mfecane that portrayed African societies as inherently self-destructive. Their work redirected attention away from narratives of Zulu militarism and internal collapse, emphasising the destabilising effects of European expansion, slave raiding, and the growth of frontier

capitalism in shaping nineteenth-century regional upheaval. This materialist reorientation provided the foundation for Cobbing's (1988) influential critique of the Mfecane as an explanatory "alibi". Cobbing contends that regional instability was driven less by internal African dynamics than by the external pressures of Portuguese slave raiding and the expanding demands of colonial capitalism. Hamilton (1993) further exposes how colonial administrators and missionaries curated oral traditions to construct Shaka as a tyrant, serving imperial ideology rather than historical truth.

Notably absent in much of this scholarship, a gap this thesis seeks to address, is an explicitly Afrocentric historiography that centres AIKS not just as a cultural practice but as an epistemological foundation for historical analysis. Recent work by Gqola (2015) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) begins to fill this void, arguing that precolonial African political thought must be understood through its own ontological premises, rather than through Eurocentric categories such as "state" or "tribe". This study aligns with that decolonial turn. This decolonial critique of historical narratives is essential for understanding the subsequent European entry into Natal, which was not a benign exploration but a calculated expansion that weaponised the myth of 'empty land' to justify territorial dispossession.

3.2.3 European entry and the illusion of *terra nullius*

European presence in Natal unfolded in phases. English traders such as Henry Fynn and Francis Farewell established a foothold at Port Natal in 1824 with the explicit permission of King Shaka, highlighting that, as Etherington (1971) explains, African sovereignty existed before colonial rule. These early traders had no military or legal authority, and their survival relied entirely on the patronage and protection of African leaders. Missionaries soon arrived, introducing literacy and Christianity; however, Etherington (2010) notes that their influence remained limited until colonial consolidation strengthened their position. The 1830s brought a more destabilising force with the arrival of the Voortrekkers, Afrikaner settlers fleeing British rule in the Cape. Their attempts to claim land through a contested treaty with Dingane, which resulted in Piet Retief's execution and the 1838 Battle of Ncome, illustrate deliberate resistance to territorial encroachment rather than irrational violence, as Morris (1966) demonstrates. Later Afrikaner nationalist accounts mythologised the Battle of Ncome as a divine covenant, which, according to Giliomee (2003) and Thompson (1969), obscured African agency and the fragility of the short-lived Natalia Republic.

British annexation of Natal in 1843 was motivated not by humanitarian concern but by strategic imperial interests. Guy (2009) explains that the British aimed to secure a warm-water port and stabilise a volatile frontier, a region characterised by competing African polities, European settlers, and ongoing conflicts over land and authority. Marks (1986) reinforces this argument by showing how the labour needs of monopoly capital required the systematic conquest and coercion of African populations. Colonial domination was therefore sustained not only through force but also through ideological mechanisms that normalised colonial values and rendered them commonsensical to the colonised.

Even after annexation, Africans remained the overwhelming majority of Natal's population, reflecting their continued centrality to the colony's social and economic life (Guy, 2009). Colonial governance quickly prioritised settler interests, introducing measures such as the 1849 hut tax, racially exclusionary legal institutions, and land proclamations that confined African communities to reserves, thereby laying the foundation for segregationist policy in Natal (Bundy, 1988; Welsh, 1971). By 1850, Natal had become a space of overlapping and contested sovereignties where African communities, though increasingly dispossessed, continued to adapt strategically. Within this contested terrain, missionary activity gained influence not as a neutral spiritual endeavour but as a mediating institution offering both tools of survival and instruments of epistemic control, as Etherington (2010) observes. This duality enabled African Christians to forge spaces such as Edendale, where land, literacy, and faith functioned as instruments of both accommodation and resistance (Guy, 2009). It is within this complex terrain of overlapping sovereignties and emerging colonial control that the missionary project in Natal must be understood, not as a neutral spiritual endeavour, but as a constitutive institution of colonial modernity that actively reorganised African land, labour, and knowledge.

3.3 Missionaries and the Missionary Project in Natal: A Historiographical and Epistemic Review

The missionary presence in Natal from the 1830s onward was neither a neutral spiritual endeavour nor a marginal colonial footnote. Instead, it functioned as a constitutive institution of colonial modernity, deeply implicated in the reorganisation of African land, labour, law, and knowledge. Missionary activity operated through unequal power relations and was frequently entangled with coercive, disciplinary, and materially violent processes that reshaped African lives long before formal colonial rule was fully consolidated. Mission

stations established by the Wesleyan Methodist Society, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), Anglicans, and others became critical nodes through which Christianity, literacy, agrarian reform, and moral discipline were introduced into African societies already navigating the destabilising effects of warfare, displacement, and emergent colonial governance (Etherington, 1971; Dubow, 2006; Guy, 2009). Conversion in this context often unfolded under conditions of structural vulnerability, where refusal carried social, economic, and sometimes physical consequences. Yet scholarly interpretations of this missionary project reveal profound historiographical divisions, reflecting broader ideological and epistemological commitments in South African historiography. Early colonial accounts, such as those by Bryant (1929), portrayed missionaries as benevolent civilisers who rescued Africans from "heathen darkness". This narrative served an ideological function: legitimising land appropriation by framing African societies as chaotic and mission stations as islands of order. Etherington (1971), as discussed in works on settler mapping and the misrepresentation of African land, observes that settler accounts often depicted indigenous territories as if they were available for European claim, a practice comparable to the doctrine of terra nullius. Such representations erased the violence through which Indigenous authority, cosmology, and land tenure were undermined and recast as obstacles to progress.

From the 1970s, liberal revisionist scholars – most notably Etherington (1971, 1975, 2014) – challenged the benevolence thesis, arguing instead that missions were contested spaces where African agency significantly shaped outcomes. Etherington demonstrated that *amakholwa* strategically leveraged mission education, literacy, and legal knowledge to acquire land, engage markets, and assert autonomy. Within this framework, conversion was less about doctrinal belief than about pragmatic adaptation to structural vulnerability – women fleeing forced marriage, individuals accused of witchcraft, and displaced persons seeking refuge (Tallie, 2016; Guy, 2009). However, even within these adaptive strategies, conversion remained embedded in asymmetrical relations of power that constrained choice and normalised cultural rupture.

A more radical critique emerged from Marxist and political-economic historians. Morris (1976) argues that missions propagated a "Gospel of Work" that instilled capitalist values such as punctuality, thrift, nuclear family norms, and obedience, thereby preparing African converts for incorporation into a racialised (capitalist) labour market. Similarly, Elbourme (2002) contends that missionaries functioned as ideological intermediaries, representing African societies as backward to justify colonial annexation. In this view, the missionary

project did not merely accompany colonialism but enabled it by producing compliant subjects and fragmented communities, as discussed in Chapter Two. Building on this perspective, Marks (1986) demonstrates that the conflicts commonly described as the "Shakan wars" generated large numbers of displaced Africans who were rendered landless and vulnerable. Mission stations, she argues, emerged as sites of profound social reorganisation rather than mere refuge. Within these spaces, missionaries actively reshaped African economic and social life by promoting differentiation, stratification, and new class formations. By casting the precolonial past as chaotic and despotic, missionary institutions legitimised the imposition of Victorian moral codes and market-oriented agricultural practices, presenting these as pathways to order and progress. Within these spaces, conversion was inseparable from processes of dispossession, discipline, and social differentiation that carried both material and epistemic violence.

In recent decades, postcolonial and decolonial scholars have deepened this critique by centring epistemic violence. Mignolo (2007) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) frame missionary activity as a key mechanism of coloniality of knowledge, which devalued AIKS by positioning Western Christianity and science as universal. Masondo (2015) and Ntombana (2015) document how missionaries condemned *lobolo*, polygamy, ancestral veneration, and *ukuthwasa* (healer initiation) as "sinful", thereby violently interrupting intergenerational transmission of Indigenous epistemologies. As discussed in Chapter Two, such practices were not merely cultural but epistemologically grounded, integrating spiritual accountability, ecological balance, and communal ethics (Berkes & Folkes, 1993). The cumulative effect was a form of conversion that operated as epistemic severance rather than spiritual exchange. Despite these critiques, few scholars have articulated an explicitly Afrocentric historiography of Natal's missions that centres *Ubuntu*, ancestral relationality, or spiritual ecology as analytical frameworks. This gap, as noted by Gqola (2015) and Mkhize (2015), reflects the ongoing marginalisation of African epistemologies, even in "progressive" scholarship. This study seeks to contribute to that emerging tradition by reading missionary encounters through the lens of epistemic resiliency, not just erasure.

Mission stations also functioned as refuges and laboratories of social engineering. Land ownership became a central arena of African agency. Krige (1936) first noted that *amakholwa* pursued freehold tenure not as a rejection of mission life but as its logical extension. Later, Kumalo (2020) and Meintjes (2020) confirmed that missionaries, such as James Allison, facilitated land syndicates that enabled collective purchase, laying the groundwork for

settlements like Edendale. However, these opportunities emerged within, and never outside of, structures established through earlier coercive conversions and dispossession.

By the 1880s, the prosperity of mission-educated Africans as farmers, transport riders, and traders threatened the racialised political economy. The state responded by restricting land purchase, denying collective legal exemption, and dismantling industrial education (Etherington, 1978; Swartz, 2015). Conversion, once a pathway to inclusion, became grounds for surveillance. Mission education further exemplified this contradiction. Before the 1950s, missions were the sole providers of formal schooling for Africans (Kallaway, 2002). Schools introduced literacy, numeracy, and disciplinary routines, timetables, exams, and graded classes that reshaped subjectivity in line with Western norms (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991).

However, these same tools enabled intellectual resistance: Edendale residents drafted petitions, managed land records, and engaged colonial law (Whelan, 2012). As Vail (1991) notes, literacy became a technology of critique. This duality culminated in the state's war on Black Christianity in the early 20th century. Fearing the political potential of African-led churches, colonial authorities suppressed Ethiopianist movements, denied preaching licenses, and restricted African ministers to white-supervised stations (Etherington, 2012). This implies that respectability, achieved through conversion, offered no protection from racial domination. Thus, the missionary project in Natal embodied a foundational colonial contradiction: it promised inclusion through assimilation but enforced exclusion through race. Conversion operated simultaneously as opportunity and violence, material, social, and epistemic. It was within this tension between epistemic displacement and strategic appropriation that African Christians forged spaces of constrained autonomy. Edendale emerged as a historically contingent space of African agency, produced through the tension between missionary projects of assimilation and African strategies of adaptation, resistance, and self-making. This tension was most acutely felt at the level of the individual and the household, where the process of conversion operated as a profound epistemic violence, demanding the systematic dismantling of Indigenous social and moral life.

3.3.1 The violence of conversion: Epistemicide in colonial Natal

Conversion in nineteenth-century Natal cannot be understood as a neutral or purely spiritual transition. Rather, it constituted a deeply intrusive process that reconfigured African social life, knowledge systems, and modes of belonging. As Meintjes (2020) demonstrates, conversion entailed far more than religious affiliation; it initiated a comprehensive

transformation that penetrated virtually every sphere of life. Converts were introduced to literacy and new communicative forms, adopted unfamiliar agricultural technologies, and were disciplined into altered understandings of time, space, and social order. These changes were not incidental but integral to the missionary project, which sought to refashion African subjects in accordance with Christian and colonial norms. Central to this process was the enforced withdrawal from social rituals and institutions that had previously structured identity and authority in precolonial African societies. Practices such as initiation rites, ancestral veneration, polygynous marriage, and communal land tenure were condemned as incompatible with Christian morality (Meintjes, 1988; Masondo, 2015; Ntombana, 2015). Conversion, therefore, required not only doctrinal adherence but also disengagement from the epistemic and relational frameworks through which communal belonging had been constituted. This frequently generated conflict within households and provoked resistance from elders and chiefs, who recognised missionary demands as an assault on established social authority (Meintjes, 2020).

This transformation unfolded within a colonial context marked by dispossession and political subjugation. By the mid-nineteenth century, African communities in Natal were increasingly subject to colonial rule, land alienation, and legal control (Etherington, 1971; Marks, 1986). Mission stations functioned within this broader colonial hierarchy and were welcomed by the colonial state as sites for educating and regulating African populations. Mission schools received government subsidies and were subject to official inspection, underscoring the close entanglement between missionary activity and colonial governance (Meintjes, 2020; Kallaway, 2002). While missionaries emphasised moral reform and salvation, colonial officials viewed education primarily as a means of producing a disciplined and reliable labour force (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). Within these conditions, the apparent voluntarism of conversion was often illusory. As Meintjes (1988) documents, converts who refused to abandon practices deemed “heathen” risked expulsion from mission protection. For displaced populations seeking refuge from warfare, famine, or social marginalisation, such sanctions rendered conversion less a matter of free choice than a condition for survival. Elders were frequently delegitimised as custodians of “superstition,” ancestral knowledge was suppressed, and converts were required to renounce core elements of African social and moral life. Meintjes (2020) characterises this process as a “painful renunciation of the central tenets” of African identity, producing a rupture that preceded and shaped later settlement patterns.

By the time Reverend James Allison and his followers established Edendale in 1851, many of the African settlers he led had already undergone this far-reaching process of social and epistemic reorientation. Their arrival in Edendale, therefore, did not mark the beginning of transformation but rather the consolidation of changes initiated through earlier missionary encounters. As Swartz (2015) and Epprecht (2010) note, early *amakholwa* increasingly defined themselves in opposition to "tribal" customs and law, embracing an identity as Christianised and "civilised" Africans positioned against Indigenous knowledge systems. This self-understanding was not merely strategic but was produced through missionary pedagogy that taught converts to regard African epistemologies as inferior or sinful.

In this sense, conversion in colonial Natal operated as a form of epistemic violence: a systematic disruption of Indigenous modes of knowing, relating, and transmitting knowledge across generations. Decolonial scholars describe this process as epistemicide, the destruction or devaluation of non-Western knowledge systems through colonial domination (Mignolo, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2014). Within the Natal context, this violence was intensified by what Marks (1986) identifies as the convergence of warfare, displacement, and missionary intervention, which rendered African communities particularly vulnerable to epistemic surrender. The founding of Edendale must therefore be situated within a longer historical trajectory in which conversion functioned not simply as religious change, but as a foundational mechanism of colonial reordering that reshaped African social life before land was acquired and settlement formalised. This foundational reordering set the stage for the founding of Edendale in 1851. This event must be understood not as an isolated act of missionary benevolence, but as a complex culmination of African displacement, strategic agency, and institutional contingency in the volatile aftermath of British annexation.

3.4 The Founding of Edendale (1851): Displacement, Collective Purchase, and the Birth of Georgetown

Edendale emerged from a confluence of African displacement, strategic agency, and institutional contingency in the volatile aftermath of British annexation. Its founding must be understood as the culmination of a decade-long journey by a multi-ethnic group of African Christians (later known as *amakholwa*) who, having been uprooted repeatedly, sought a permanent foothold outside the authority of both African rulers and missionary societies.

Their success in acquiring freehold land and establishing Georgetown, a planned grid-layout settlement, marked a rare experiment in African autonomy that would simultaneously inspire hope and provoke colonial anxiety.

3.4.1 From Mahamba to Indaleni: The precarity of mission refuge

The community that founded Edendale emerged from earlier mission activity under the Wesleyan missionary James Allison, who had established mission communities such as Indaleni near Richmond before helping to guide the settlement on the farm *Welverdiend* near Pietermaritzburg. As Meintjes (2020) and Swartz (2015) document, Allison's followers were not ethnically homogeneous but were drawn from Swazi, Zulu, Hlubi, Rolong, Griqua, Sotho, and Tlokwe backgrounds, united by shared experiences of warfare, displacement, and the search for sanctuary. In the mid-1840s, seeking stability, the group relocated from Thaba'Nchu to the Mahamba Mission in Swaziland. However, political tensions with the Swazi monarchy, exacerbated by missionary interference in royal succession, forced them to flee again in late 1846 (Croeser, 2013). Approximately 200-400 refugees crossed into Natal, where they were temporarily settled at Indaleni Mission Station, near Richmond. At Indaleni, however, their tenure remained insecure. As a station owned by the Wesleyan Missionary

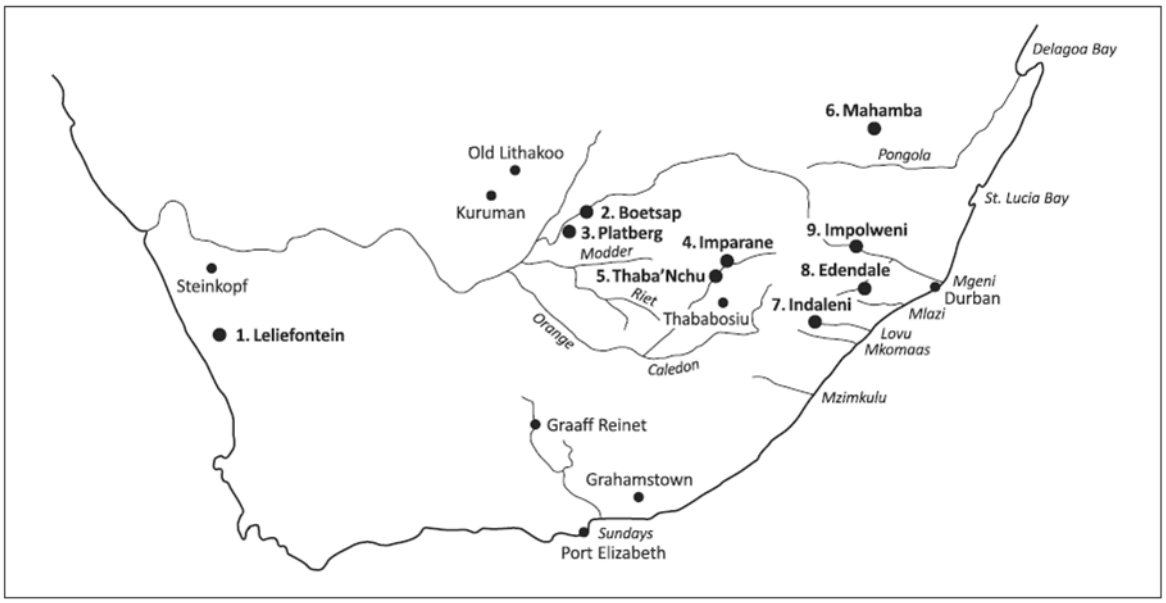


Figure 3-1: Allison's missions, showing the location of Edendale (Meintjes, 2020)

Society converts lived at the sufferance of missionary authority, with no legal claim to the land they cultivated (Etherington, 1975). This experience of double displacement, first from

ancestral homelands, then from mission refuge, fostered a decisive conviction: autonomous land ownership was essential to any meaningful form of community.

3.4.2 The 1851 breakaway: Allison's resignation and collective self-determination

A rupture occurred in 1851 when the Wesleyan Missionary Society ordered Allison's transfer to another station (Meintjes, 2020). Interpreting this as an existential threat to the community's fragile stability, Allison resigned and persuaded approximately 500 followers to leave Indaleni with him, an act of collective defiance that transformed a dependent congregation into a self-determining community (Croeser, 2013; Meintjes, 2020). Later that year, Allison facilitated the purchase of *Welverdiend*, a 6,000-acre farm in the fertile Msunduzi River valley, nine kilometres south of Pietermaritzburg. Crucially, *Welverdiend* was not "empty" land awaiting Christian cultivation. As Meintjes (1988, p. 61) documents, the farm had previously belonged to the Voortrekker leader, Andries Pretorius, and had been incorporated into settler landholdings following the British annexation of Natal in 1843. Such land grants formed part of a broader colonial strategy to reward Voortrekker military leadership and consolidate settler control over territory (Thompson, 2001; Etherington, 2010).

However, the availability of *Welverdiend* for purchase in 1851 must be situated within earlier processes of Indigenous displacement that preceded both Allison and Pretorius. Some scholars, including Epprecht (2010), drawing on Wright (1988), argue that by the time Voortrekkers established Pietermaritzburg in 1838, many long-established communities in the Msunduzi River valley had already been fragmented or displaced during the Mfecane/Difaqane period, as warfare, ecological stress, and forced migration destabilised the region. As I discussed under 3.2.2, this narrative obscures both the other (colonial) forces at play and the continuity of Indigenous presence across the wider Pietermaritzburg region (as I argued above, according to Guy (2009), even after British annexation, Africans remained the overwhelming majority of Natal's population). The layered and cumulative disruption, however, rendered Indigenous occupation less visible within colonial records, enabling settler claims to land without the need for immediate acts of expulsion at the moment of acquisition.

Welverdiend should therefore be understood as land "cleared" not through a singular act of removal by Pretorius himself (although this also occurred), but through layered forms of violence, regional warfare, demographic collapse, and colonial reclassification of land as

alienable property, that had already severed Indigenous epistemic and territorial relationships to place. However, it is crucial to remember that, at its founding, Edendale mission station was surrounded by the area's original Indigenous inhabitants, many of whom came to work and settle in Edendale over the following 150 years.

The farm was renamed Edendale (the Valley of Eden), a toponym expressing both Christian aspiration and political hope. The initial settlement comprised 100 families (about 500 people), comprising both Christians and non-Christians, although full land rights required adherence to a moral covenant that banned polygamy and alcohol (Gwala, 2019). Residents became known as *amakholwa* and *oNonhlevu* (first converts), signifying spiritual and social distinction. Crucially, settlers laid out Georgetown, a planned, grid-patterned township with roads, a chapel, and water systems, a deliberate urban form that asserted a modern, Christian, and civic identity, distinct from both African homesteads and settler farms (Barry, 2019; Meintjes, 1988). This was not organic growth but intentional community design, enacted on land already transformed by colonial spatial logics of ownership and exclusion.

3.4.3 Freehold as collective experiment: *Ubuntu* meets colonial property

Edendale represented Natal's first sustained experiment in African freehold land tenure (Meintjes, 1988). Because colonial law barred Africans from registering land in their own names until 1885, Allison held title as nominal owner, subdividing the farm into £5 plots. A joint shareholding system enabled collective repayment, fusing *Ubuntu*-inspired communal ethics with emerging property norms (Meintjes, 2020). Residents pooled earnings from wage labour, transport riding, and market gardening to clear the debt by 1858.

By 1861, 56 individual title deeds were issued to African landowners (i.e. the original settlers of Edendale, Allison's followers), including Daniel Msimang, Jonathan Xaba, Johannes Kumalo, and Dan Molife, figures who would become pillars of Edendale's economic and civic life (Gwala, 2019). Within four years of settlement, this original *amakholwa* community had amassed 15 wagons, 15 ploughs, and over 100 oxen, supplying Pietermaritzburg with grain, dairy, and timber (Meintjes, 1988). This rapid accumulation was rooted in mission-acquired skills (literacy, carpentry, ox-plough farming) and strategic market integration.

Scholarly interpretations of Edendale's historical significance reveal fundamental disagreements that reflect broader historiographical currents in the study of colonial Natal. For Etherington (1975), writing from a liberal revisionist perspective, Edendale exemplifies Black entrepreneurial agency: its leaders (literate, skilled, and market-oriented) strategically

adopted plough agriculture, engaged regional trade, and constructed civic infrastructure, thereby carving out economic autonomy within colonial constraints. In contrast, Meintjes (2020) draws on Marxist and postcolonial frameworks to position the *amakholwa* not as triumphant capitalists but as a structurally constrained petty bourgeoisie, economically productive yet systematically excluded from full citizenship; their very success provoked colonial anxieties that culminated in legal and spatial containment. Mkhize (2015) and Gwala (2019) complicate both views by foregrounding cultural fluidity, arguing that Edendale's identity was never fixed but continuously negotiated between African kinship ethics, Christian moral imperatives, and the coercive logics of colonial law. Most recently, Epprecht (2016) has challenged earlier narratives that underestimated African self-direction, demonstrating how Edendale residents over time actively mobilised literacy, legal knowledge, and church-based networks not merely to accommodate colonialism but to resist its encroachments and assert collective self-governance. This historiographical divergence is not merely academic; it determines whether Edendale is interpreted as a story of assimilation (which is largely the case of the original followers of Allison) or of class formation within racial capitalism or, as this thesis argues, as a site of epistemic resilience, where African Christians (or at least those who came to settle in the area after the original *amakholwa* settlers) exercised agency to negotiate land, literacy, and faith within, against, and beyond colonial structures.

The distinction of Edendale as a site of epistemic resilience is central to the thesis's engagement with AIKS. This interpretive tension becomes especially salient when viewed through the theoretical lens developed in Chapter Two, which frames colonialism as a project of epistemicide: the systematic delegitimisation of AIKS through the imposition of Western knowledge regimes (Mignolo, 2007). Edendale's published history complicates any simple narrative of cultural erasure. While its residents adopted individual land titles, they simultaneously preserved core relational epistemologies evident in the joint shareholding model of land acquisition, the practice of collective labour (*letsema*), and community-based moral governance. These were not residual customs but deliberate acts of epistemic reconfiguration, fusing ancestral principles of reciprocity and communal stewardship with new institutional forms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Gqola, 2015).

Such hybridity, however, did not shield Edendale from colonial suspicion. Precisely because it demonstrated African capacity for self-organisation, economic productivity, and civic order, it became politically intolerable within a racialised colonial order that tolerated African

success only insofar as it reinforced subservience. As a result, Edendale's autonomy remained conditional: residents were excluded from juries, subjected to Native Law despite their Christian identity, and denied municipal self-governance. Far from marking a resolution, the founding of Edendale in 1851 was thus a precarious beginning: a testament to African agency forged through displacement and adaptation, yet already shadowed by the racial logics that would, over subsequent decades, seek to contain, regulate, and ultimately erase its anomalous presence within the colonial landscape.

3.4.4 Religious identity and the limits of Christian inclusion

While Edendale's founding in 1851 secured physical space for African Christian autonomy, the decades that followed tested the limits of inclusion within a colonial order increasingly unwilling to honour the moral contract implied by conversion. Initially, for the Indigenous people in the broader Edendale area, Christianity appeared to offer a viable path to civil recognition: baptism, monogamy, sobriety, and industriousness were promoted as markers of moral fitness that, in principle, could grant converts legal parity with white subjects, and these practices were partially embraced by members of the community (Meintjes, 2020). However, this promise remained largely rhetorical. Despite their adherence to Christian norms and their economic contributions, *amakholwa* were systematically subjected to customary law under the Shepstonian system and, later, the Natal Code, thereby rendering their faith symbolically elevated yet legally inconsequential (Guy, 1994; Meintjes, 2020). This disjuncture between moral standing and civil status generated a deepening sense of betrayal, particularly among the educated elite who had invested heavily in the colonial project's professed ideals (Etherington, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

The 1860s and 1870s became a crucible for spiritual redefinition. Economic instability exacerbated by drought, market fluctuations, and land pressures prompted not retreat but renewed religious innovation, as well as the influx of new settlers, as the original *amakholwa* were forced to sell off some of the land, or allow it to be tenanted. As Etherington (1978) observes, hardship often intensified communal reflection, with African Christians seeking not only divine reassurance but new forms of self-governance. This impulse culminated in the 1875 formation of the *Unzondelelo* (Native Home Missionary Society), an Edendale-led initiative that marked a decisive turn toward African-directed evangelism. Unlike mission-supervised outreach, *Unzondelelo* placed preaching, church discipline, and financial

management under African control, explicitly rejecting white missionary supervision in favour of indigenous spiritual leadership (Etherington, 1979; Mkhize, 2015).

This was not a schism for its own sake, but an assertion that authentic Christianity could be both African and autonomous. This shift coincided with the growing authority of African preachers, teachers, and class leaders within mission communities. As Mashabela (2009) documents, these figures became critical conduits of religious and social life, extending Christian networks into Natal's interior while adapting doctrine to local ethical frameworks. Simultaneously, mission education enabled *amakholwa* to occupy influential intermediary roles as interpreters, clerks, artisans, and catechists, positioning them at the nexus of colonial administration and African society (Elphick, 2012). Their literacy and bilingualism allowed them to navigate legal systems, draft petitions, and advocate for community interests, further blurring the line between religious and civic leadership.

However, this very success provoked colonial alarm. By the 1880s, as land pressures mounted and white settler anxieties intensified, the state began to reinterpret African Christian autonomy as subversion. Etherington (2012) characterises this shift as a deliberate "war on Black Christianity": African preachers were denied licenses, barred from performing marriages, and confined to mission stations under white oversight. Independent movements (particularly those labelled "Ethiopianist") were surveilled, restricted, or banned outright. This was not merely a religious regulation but an attempt at epistemic policing to contain a form of knowledge, authority, and community that threatened the racial hierarchy underpinning colonial rule (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The repression of African religious autonomy marked a profound rupture in colonial relations. The *amakholwa*, long held up as exemplars of colonial civilisation, came to realise that neither property, piety, nor productivity could shield them from racial exclusion. As Mkhize (2015) notes, this disillusionment catalysed a strategic pivot: from seeking inclusion within colonial institutions to building parallel structures of resistance. The formation of the Natal Native Congress in 1900, with strong participation from Edendale (Etherington, 2018), emerged directly from this trajectory, transforming spiritual networks into a platform for political mobilisation.

By the early twentieth century, Edendale's trajectory revealed the colonial state's fundamental contradiction: it invited African Christians to embody its civilising ideals, only to punish them for doing so too successfully. The shift from accommodation to containment was neither accidental nor sudden, but the cumulative outcome of a racial order that could not tolerate African independence even when cloaked in its own Christian language. In this light,

the repression of African Christianity must be understood not as a failure of faith, but as epistemic violence: an effort to silence African ways of knowing, being, and governing that dared to claim legitimacy on their own terms (Gqola, 2015; Mignolo, 2007).

3.4.5 Education, skill, and the politics of knowledge

As argued earlier, mission education in nineteenth-century Natal functioned as a contradictory tool of colonial power, offering limited literacy while enacting epistemicide. In the absence of state schooling, mission schools became key sites where colonial discipline reshaped African subjectivity and displaced relational modes of knowing central to AIKS. Literacy thus operated as a technology of colonial modernity, promising inclusion while demanding epistemic surrender (Etherington, 2005; Kallaway, 2002).

Access to the mission education system remained tightly constrained. Only a minority of Africans (those already affiliated with missions or residing near stations like Edendale) could attend, and even then, the curricula prioritised religious conformity, manual training, and deference over critical thinking (Christie, 1991). Nevertheless, those who acquired literacy and vocational skills, such as carpentry, wagon-building, teaching, and clerical work, gained rare leverage in a colonial economy increasingly hostile to African autonomy. As subsistence agriculture became untenable due to land loss and taxation, these competencies enabled entry into semi-skilled trades and intermediary roles that bridged the gap between colonial administration and African communities (Lambert, 2009; Hamilton, 1998). In Edendale, this literate stratum played a decisive role, managing land records, drafting petitions, interpreting legislation, and organising church and school governance practices that, as Whelan (2012) notes, required not just reading and writing, but also legal and political consciousness.

However, this very competence provoked settler backlash. By the 1880s, white artisans and farmers began framing educated Africans as unfair competitors, accusing them of leveraging missionary privilege to “invade” economic spaces reserved for whites (Etherington, 1975). Colonial policy responded not by expanding opportunities but by contracting them: funding for industrial education was slashed, teacher training was restricted, and certification requirements were tightened to limit African advancement (Swartz, 2015). By the early twentieth century, this material anxiety had crystallised into racial ideology, with officials asserting that African intellectual capacity was inherently limited and that education should be narrowly vocational – designed not to produce citizens, but a compliant labour force (Epprecht, 2016). This shift reveals a core colonial paradox: Africans were encouraged to

"civilise" themselves but punished when they succeeded too convincingly. Critically, African Christians did not passively internalise this logic. As Mkhize (2015) and Meintjes (2020) demonstrate, literacy became a tool of critique and counter-knowledge production. In Edendale and beyond, the educated elite used newspapers like *Inkanyiso Yase Natal* to expose the hypocrisy of a system that demanded moral improvement while enforcing permanent subordination. Such interventions were not merely reactive but epistemically generative, articulating alternative visions of justice, citizenship, and community grounded in both Christian ethics and African relationality (Mkhize, 2015; Natal Society Foundation, 1986). This intellectual resistance, however, only intensified colonial fears. Literacy was increasingly seen not as a marker of civilisation but as a vector of dissent, further justifying the state's turn toward educational containment.

The culmination of this trajectory arrived with the *Bantu Education Act of 1953*, which explicitly dismantled the remnants of mission schooling to install a system designed to "train" rather than "educate" (Kallaway, 2002). Unlike the earlier mission model, which, despite its colonial entanglements, had enabled social mobility and political articulation, Bantu Education severed knowledge from critique, embedding African learners within a rigid hierarchy that naturalised racial inequality. Viewed through the lens of Chapter Two, this history reflects not the absence of education for Africans, but the colonial state's deliberate management of knowledge: first through missionary mediation, then through epistemic restriction. In Edendale, education thus functioned not as a linear path to inclusion, but as a contested terrain where African agency, Western epistemology, and colonial power collided, producing both empowerment and erasure, adaptation and resistance, simultaneously.

3.4.6 War, militarisation, and African negotiation

While the broader colonial and missionary transformations set the stage for African Christian settlements such as Edendale, the literature emphasises that warfare and militarisation were distinct and formative aspects of nineteenth-century Natal life. Laband (1995, 2009) and Etherington (2001, 2014) explain that African converts from mission communities became actively involved in colonial military campaigns as observers, auxiliaries, scouts, messengers, and labourers. They contributed to colonial operations while navigating their own social positioning. These engagements reflected both the militarised environment of the frontier and the practical opportunities that participation offered for skill acquisition, mobility, and

recognition within emerging African Christian communities. African involvement in military conflicts is documented across several pivotal events.

The Langalibalele War (1873) was a conflict between the Natal colonial government and the Hlubi chief Langalibalele kaMthimkhulu, triggered by colonial demands that African men register and surrender firearms. Langalibalele's refusal to comply and to present himself before colonial authorities was framed as rebellion, although it was rooted in resistance to coercive and racialised colonial control rather than armed insurrection (Laband, 1995; Etherington, 2014). The colonial state responded with military force supported by African auxiliaries. A clash at Bushman's River Pass was used to justify a broader campaign, leading to Langalibalele's capture and a deeply flawed trial that violated principles of justice (Mahoney, 2012). African Christians from Edendale participated as auxiliary forces under colonial command. As Etherington (2014), Laband (1995), and Mahoney (2012) note, their involvement reflects the ambiguous position of *amakholwa* communities, exercising constrained agency within colonial structures in hopes of protection or legitimacy. The conflict illustrates how colonial power mobilised African divisions to consolidate control, foreshadowing later wars such as the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879.

During the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, African auxiliaries provided strategic support. Knight (2007), Laband (2009), Meintjes (2020), Mkhize (2015), and Stapleton (1994), note that mission-educated Africans were employed in scouting, intelligence gathering, construction of fortifications, and logistical support for infantry and cavalry units. These roles highlight how African Christians negotiated their participation in colonial military structures, balancing obligations to colonial authorities with the protection of communal interests. Sergeant Major Simeon Kambule of Edendale, who led African auxiliaries at Isandlwana, reportedly rallied his men "for life or death" and later rescued a wounded British officer – acts for which he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (Maphalala, 1979). Yet even this recognition was framed to affirm imperial loyalty rather than African agency.

Participation continued into the Anglo-Boer War (also known as the South African War) of 1899 to 1902, a conflict between the British Empire and the Boer republics, in which Africans were officially excluded from combat but were extensively recruited as labourers, drivers, scouts, and intelligence agents. Although African involvement was denied formal recognition or post-war benefits, it was indispensable to the colonial war effort (Epprecht, 2017; Thompson, 2001). This pattern persisted during the Bhambatha Rebellion of 1906, an armed uprising led by Chief Bhambatha kaMancinza in response to the imposition of the

colonial poll tax and deepening economic and political dispossession, representing a direct militarised African challenge to colonial authority in Natal (Guy, 1994; Laband, 1995; Marks, 1970). Closely associated with this uprising was the *Unzondelelo* War of 1906, led by the Zondi leader Unzondelelo, which emerged from the same conditions of taxation, forced labour, and the erosion of African political autonomy. Like Bhambatha, Unzondelelo mobilised armed resistance grounded in Indigenous political authority and local grievances, and colonial suppression again relied heavily on African auxiliaries, including mission-educated Africans, for intelligence gathering, tracking, and logistical support (Guy, 1994; Laband, 2009; Sithole, 2010).

The Langalibalele, Bhambatha, and Unzondelelo uprisings are particularly significant because they demonstrate that African resistance to colonial domination in Natal was continuous rather than episodic in this period. Against this backdrop, the position of Edendale's African Christian community becomes especially revealing. Rather than aligning with armed resistance movements, Edendale residents largely positioned themselves within colonial auxiliary structures. Epprecht (2017), Laband (2009), and Thompson (2001) observe that African Christians often served in logistical and support roles, including wagon driving, intelligence gathering, and hospital assistance, while Laband (1995), Marks (1970), Sithole (2010), and Spencer (2005) describe the Natal Native Horse, a mounted auxiliary force largely composed of mission educated Africans, as central to suppressing resistance during the Bhambatha and Unzondelelo campaigns. These accounts underscore the dual nature of participation. Africans contributed materially to colonial campaigns while gaining training, mobility, and social recognition within their own communities.

Engagement with militarisation also reshaped everyday life and social structures within African Christian settlements. Etherington (2014), Guy (1994), and Hamilton (1998) show that the constant presence of military expeditions influenced patterns of mobility, labour, and community organisation. Mahoney (2012), Meintjes (2020), and Swartz (2015) highlight that Africans' military service drew upon skills cultivated in mission schools, including literacy, horsemanship, and disciplined coordination, which in turn enhanced social standing and opportunities for leadership. Edgecombe (1986) and Laband (1995) note that missionary and colonial records frequently acknowledged African auxiliaries as reliable and capable, reinforcing the perception that participation conferred status within both colonial and African spheres.

Participation in warfare also intersected with emerging notions of masculinity, authority, and identity in African Christian communities. Etherington (2001), Hamilton (1998), and Wright (2010) argue that military service offered men opportunities to demonstrate leadership, discipline, and loyalty, while Gump (1996), Guy (1994), and Laband (2009) emphasise that these experiences reshaped expectations of male authority in mission settlements. Meintjes (2020) and Swartz (2015) demonstrate that in Edendale, early community leaders frequently drew on their military experience to consolidate social influence, illustrating the mutual constitution of militarisation and Christian identity in the formation of new African social structures. However, this mutual constitution of militarisation, Christian identity, and African agency was ultimately unsustainable within a colonial order that could not tolerate Black autonomy. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the state systematically shifted its strategy from conditional accommodation to the institutionalisation of rigid racial exclusion.

3.5 From Accommodation to Containment: The Institutionalisation of Racial Exclusion

The trajectory of Edendale after 1870 reveals not a natural decline but the deliberate consolidation of a racialised colonial order that could no longer tolerate the anomaly of African freehold autonomy. While the 1851 founding of Edendale occurred in a moment of administrative ambiguity, when British authority in Natal was still consolidating, and mission mediation offered a fragile buffer, the closing decades of the nineteenth century saw the state systematically dismantle that space of autonomy. This transition was neither abrupt nor accidental, but a cumulative process of legal reclassification, spatial regulation, economic restriction, and administrative subordination that redefined Edendale from a model of Christian civilisation into a problem to be managed. Land, once the foundation of Edendale's claim to inclusion, became the primary terrain of containment. Despite holding legally registered title deeds, residents found their ownership increasingly circumscribed by a colonial state unwilling to recognise African property on equal terms with white settlers.

This process of legal containment intensified in the early twentieth century through demographic and spatial compression. As Epprecht (2016) shows, the 1903 closure of Crown lands to African purchasers blocked outward migration while turning unallotted portions of Edendale into sites of speculative occupation. The convergence of multiple population groups between 1900 and 1910 fragmented what Meintjes (1988) identifies as a formerly coherent unit of collective African freehold, as settlement spread beyond Georgetown onto the

commonage and outlying allotments. This overcrowding, produced by structural constraint rather than communal failure, was recorded by colonial authorities as African pathology and used to justify sanitary surveillance through institutions such as the Natal Local Health Commission from 1905 onward (Caesar, 2015). In effect, spatial compression became a mechanism of containment that not only undermined land-based autonomy but also constituted a further layer of epistemic displacement, disrupting residual Indigenous knowledge transmission within an increasingly regulated colonial landscape.

Prosperity itself became suspect: as Edendale's agricultural output, transport networks, and skilled trades supplied Pietermaritzburg's growing economy, settler anxiety intensified, reframing African success not as evidence of "civilisation" but as a threat to racial hierarchy (Etherington, 1978; Meintjes, 2020). Colonial policy responded not by extending rights but by tightening control through land use restrictions, discriminatory taxation, and, eventually, the reclassification of Edendale as a "native area" despite its freehold status (Epprecht, 2016; Natal Society Foundation, 1986). This legal ambiguity was structurally enforced through a dual legal system that rendered land ownership hollow. Although Edendale residents held individual titles, they remained subject to Native Law, a body of customary legislation designed for rural reserve populations, rather than urbanising Christian freeholders (Guy, 2009; Spiller, 1987).

As Meintjes (2020) documents, this duality raises a deeply complex and contested issue: the extent to which it contributed to the erasure of African knowledge and customs. As she shows, families were compelled to uphold practices such as *lobolo* and customary inheritance not as authentic expressions of Indigenous epistemology, but as bureaucratic prerequisites for legal recognition of marriage and property rights, even when these practices conflicted with their Christian convictions or evolving communal norms. Critically, this reveals a central mechanism of colonial governance: rather than simply erasing African cultural practices, the state selectively preserved, distorted, and redeployed them as instruments of control. This duality, simultaneous erasure and instrumentalisation, reflects what Mamdani (1996) terms the "bifurcated state", wherein colonisers governed Africans through "customary" institutions stripped of their democratic, adaptive, and ethical foundations. In Natal, Native Law did not reflect living AIKS but a fossilised caricature designed to fix African identity in static, governable forms. Thus, colonial power operated not only through epistemicide (Mignolo, 2007) but also through epistemic extraction: appropriating fragments of Indigenous practice while severing them from their ontological and axiological roots. The result was a double

violence: on one hand, the delegitimisation of holistic knowledge systems; on the other, the coercive re-inscription of decontextualised customs as tools of administrative surveillance and social fragmentation.

In effect, colonial law instrumentalised selected customs, stripping them of their ethical, spiritual, and communal foundations and, in doing so, fragmenting and delegitimising AIKS. This process demonstrates that AIKS were not simply displaced; they were reconfigured under colonial authority, highlighting the resilience, adaptation, and selective retention of African ways of knowing even in the face of systemic epistemic disruption (Bennett, 2004). Similarly, exclusion from jury duty and the unchecked discretion of magistrates denied residents the procedural protections afforded to white citizens, exposing them to arbitrary governance. The state's refusal to grant communal exemption from Native Law, insisting instead on fragmented, individual applications under *Law 28 of 1865*, further undermined collective cohesion, a strategy that Edendale leaders rightly identified as divisive and destabilising (Meintjes, 2020).

Political exclusion followed a parallel arc. Despite its size, economic productivity, and the demonstrated capacity for self-governance evident in Georgetown's planned infrastructure and community institutions, Edendale was consistently denied recognition as a corporate township with its own town board. Such a status would have conferred municipal autonomy and fiscal control, placing Edendale on par with white settlements. Instead, colonial authorities imposed administrative subordination. The *Native Administration Law of 1875* initiated a process of tribalisation, reconstituting African identity through state-sanctioned "chiefly" structures regardless of actual social organisation. This logic culminated in the 1891 *Code of Native Law*, which reclassified Edendale's elected headmen as "chiefs", a legal fiction that erased the community's Christian, freehold, and civic character in favour of a colonial stereotype of African tradition (Meintjes, 2020).

Economic policies reinforced this containment. As Morris (1976) and Meintjes (2020) argue, Edendale's independent production threatened a political economy increasingly reliant on cheap, disciplined African labour. Colonial interventions such as hut taxes, pass laws, and restrictions on African transport riding were not neutral regulations but deliberate mechanisms to undermine self-sufficiency and propel residents into the wage economy. Critically, as Shula Marks (1975) observes in her study of John Dube and African politics in Natal, the cumulative effect of colonial land policy, particularly the 1913 *Natives Land Act*, was to undermine African economic security and social foundations. The Act's restriction of

African landownership, denial of access to white-owned land, and the transformation of many African tenants into precarious labourers eroded the material basis for sustained community investment and maintenance. In Natal, while many Africans continued to farm and labour under highly constrained conditions, the structural impact of segregation legislation contributed to economic stagnation and social dislocation in many mission-linked communities. As state investment was withheld and regulatory burdens mounted, physical infrastructure such as schools, churches, and homesteads in places like Edendale fell into disrepair, not because of communal neglect, but because colonial policy systematically defunded and devalued African spaces. This deterioration of built environments signalled the state's withdrawal of both material support and symbolic recognition of African advancement.

By the time of the Union in 1910, these dynamics were codified into national policy. The 1913 *Natives Land Act*, though its most severe restrictions applied elsewhere, symbolised the closure of the frontier of African land acquisition, retroactively casting Edendale's 1851 purchase as a historical anomaly (Bundy, 1979; Davenport & Saunders, 2000). Marks (1986) identifies the *1913 Natives Land Act* as a pivotal moment in the capitalist transformation of South African agriculture. By sharply restricting African access to land, the state entrenched a political economy that obscured white land dispossession and instead attributed African impoverishment to supposed cultural or tribal inadequacy. In this way, hegemonic ideology functioned to recast lived experiences of dispossession and exploitation as natural outcomes of African incapacity rather than as products of colonial power.

Edendale was subsequently declared a scheduled area, administratively aligned with African townships rather than recognised as a distinct freehold community. Overcrowding intensified as spatial expansion was blocked, and the settlement's earlier vibrancy gave way to infrastructural strain. Colonial authorities then cited this condition as evidence of African "inability" to manage urban space (Bundy, 1979; Marks, 1975). Urban planning discourse further legitimised this erasure. Municipal authorities in Pietermaritzburg increasingly framed African settlements like Edendale as sites of sanitation risk and social disorder, a racialised narrative that Maylam (1986) and Swanson (1976) identify as central to the logic of "sanitary segregation". These arguments recast the consequences of decades of legal containment as inherent African pathology, justifying external control through bodies such as the Natal Local Health Commission, which assumed governance of Edendale in 1941 and ruled it "no

differently from any other black township", permitting only an Advisory Board with no executive authority (Meintjes, 2020).

Apartheid after 1948 did not introduce a new logic but systematised and intensified these exclusionary practices. The Group Areas Act (1950) reclassified Edendale as an exclusively African area, dismantling its earlier multiracial commercial networks and enforcing the forced removal of Indian residents, an act of social engineering that violently erased decades of coexistence (Epprecht, 2016). By the 1970s, containment escalated to an existential threat. The 1975 Master Plan proposed absorbing Edendale into a Bantu Trust township, effectively dissolving the legal distinction between historic freeholders and state-allocated residents. This move sought to erase Edendale's foundational identity as an autonomous landowning community and fold it into the bureaucratic uniformity of apartheid urbanism. However, Edendale remained a site of persistent resistance. Church groups, civic associations, and youth movements mobilised against administrative absorption, asserting claims to dignity, land, and self-determination (Mkhize, 2015; Croeser, 2013). By the 1980s, the settlement had become a hub of anti-apartheid activism, with churches and schools serving as nodes of political organisation. This resilience was not accidental but rooted in historical memory, communal cohesion, and the enduring legitimacy of collective landholding principles that defied the apartheid state's attempt to reduce Edendale to a mere township.

Today, Edendale endures as both a lived community and a contested archive, a place where descendants, knowledge holders, and researchers continue to recover, reconstruct, and validate African epistemologies that have been overshadowed by colonial narratives. Its streets, ruins, and oral histories testify not to decline but to sustained presence amid systematic erasure. This arc of containment must be understood as the logical outcome of a racialised colonial order that could not accommodate African independence, even when it conformed to its stated ideals. Edendale's founders had embraced property, literacy, Christianity, and respectability, yet these very attributes became grounds for surveillance, restriction, and erasure. As argued in Chapter Two, this reflects the coloniality of power: a system in which racial hierarchy is maintained not through overt conquest alone, but through the normalisation of exclusion within ostensibly neutral institutions. Edendale's history thus stands as a testament to African agency persisting within constraint, and a warning of how colonial modernity tolerates difference only when it reinforces, rather than challenges, its foundational inequalities.

3.6 Conclusion

The history of Edendale, as reconstructed in this chapter, reveals one coherent logic of colonialism: a system that invited African Christians to embody its civilising ideals through land ownership, literacy, Christianity, and respectability, yet punished them for doing so too successfully. From its founding in 1851 as a freehold settlement built on collective purchase and moral covenant, to its gradual containment under Native Law, and finally its bureaucratic absorption into apartheid urbanism, Edendale was consistently treated not as proof of African capacity, but as a threat to racial hierarchy. This trajectory was not random. It was produced through deliberate legal, administrative, and spatial mechanisms, dual legal systems, retraditionalisation of governance, denial of municipal status, scheduled area designation, forced removals, and master plans for absorption that together constituted a century-long project of epistemic and territorial containment. Western institutions like private property and codified law, far from enabling integration, were strategically manipulated to preserve white supremacy while offering only conditional, revocable inclusion to Africans.

However, Edendale's story is not one of passive erasure. At every stage, from the establishment of Georgetown's planned infrastructure to the formation of the *Unzondelelo* missionary society and anti-apartheid mobilisation in the 1980s, residents asserted agency, adapted traditions, and preserved their communal identity. This epistemic resilience, rooted in relational understandings of land, ancestry, and collective responsibility, defied the colonial and apartheid state's attempt to reduce Edendale to a mere township. As this study moves into the analysis of contemporary practices in Edendale, this historical foundation is indispensable. It shows that current efforts to reclaim African Indigenous Medicine, reassert spiritual accountability, and relearn ancestral knowledge are not nostalgic returns, but forward-looking acts of epistemic regeneration in response to a long history of coloniality that sought to sever African communities from their own ways of knowing, being, and belonging. The past, as this chapter has shown, is not behind us; it lives in the land, the law, and the logic of the present.

Theoretical Framework

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three provided a historical overview of the Edendale community as documented in published scholarship. It outlined the social, political, and colonial forces that have shaped the settlement since the mid-nineteenth century, establishing the contextual foundations necessary to understand the community's contemporary knowledge landscape. Building on that historical grounding, this chapter presents the Afrocentric theoretical framework that guides the study's interpretation and direction. Afrocentricity positions African worldviews, values, and lived experiences at the centre of inquiry (Asante, 1987, 1991), offering a counter-hegemonic perspective that challenges Eurocentric dominance and affirms African epistemic agency. As Mazama (2001) argues, Afrocentricity constitutes a research paradigm, a comprehensive worldview grounded in African cosmologies, ethics, and ways of knowing. This paradigm shapes the ethical and epistemological foundations of this study, as detailed in Chapter Five. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, Afrocentricity also functions as a theory, specifically a learning theory, that provides analytical concepts to interpret how communities unlearn colonial epistemic imprints and relearn Indigenous knowledge through processes of critical reflection, memory work, and cultural reclamation.

This chapter clarifies the role of a theoretical framework in qualitative research, outlines the core principles of Afrocentricity – agency, location, and cultural centredness – and explains how they shape this study. It further introduces the learning, unlearning, and relearning triad as a dynamic model for epistemic recovery and transformation within an Afrocentric paradigm. The chapter concludes by engaging key critiques of Afrocentric theory and demonstrating how this theoretical framework underpins the literature review, research design, and methodological choices discussed in Chapter Five.

4.2 What Is a Theoretical Framework?

A theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation for a research study. It presents a structured framework of ideas, concepts, and assumptions that guides the investigation, interpretation, and analysis of phenomena (Kivunja, 2018). It functions as an analytical lens through which data are understood, enabling the researcher to situate findings within broader

intellectual traditions and scholarly debates. Unlike a literature review, which surveys existing knowledge, or a paradigm, which reflects philosophical stances about reality and knowledge, a theoretical framework is instrumental; it actively shapes how research questions are framed, how data are collected and interpreted, and how conclusions are drawn. As Abend (2019) explains, a theory is not merely a generalisation but a system of interrelated concepts that explain patterns in social life. In qualitative research that engages with issues of identity, power, and knowledge, particularly within postcolonial and decolonial paradigms, the theoretical framework anchors the inquiry in worldviews that challenge dominant narratives and foreground marginalised perspectives. For this study, Afrocentric theory serves as that anchor.

As Asante (1987) maintains, Afrocentric theory serves as a tool of epistemic resistance by directly challenging Eurocentric assumptions in academic discourse. In this study, Afrocentric theory operates not as a rigid template but as a dynamic interpretive structure that examines how Western knowledge systems have disrupted AIKS in Edendale. Drawing on Mazama's (2001) assertion that African worldviews must anchor knowledge production, the framework grounds analysis in African historical consciousness, cultural logic, and lived experience. It thereby affirms African epistemologies as legitimate and sophisticated and recognises knowledge holders as co-interpreters of their realities.

Thus, the theoretical framework in this research serves three key functions: it is interpretive, as it offers a coherent lens for analysing data; it is critical, in that it challenges the dominance of colonial and missionary-derived knowledge systems in shaping Edendale's historical narrative; and it is transformative, by supporting a research process aimed at epistemic reclamation. As I discuss below, it also aligns with the broader concepts and goals of Afrocentric theory, i.e. learning, unlearning, and relearning. Having established the role of a theoretical framework in qualitative inquiry, the following section introduces Afrocentric theory as the specific lens through which this study is conducted. It outlines its core principles – agency, location, and cultural centredness, and explains how they inform data interpretation.

4.3 Agency, location and cultural centredness

Afrocentric theory, as developed by Asante (1987, 1991, 1998, 2003), provides the theoretical framework for this study. A theoretical framework must be congruent with the study's broader

research paradigm, particularly regarding its ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions. Consistent with the Afrocentric paradigm adopted in this research, Afrocentric theory centres African worldviews, values, histories, and lived experiences as the primary vantage point for interpreting African realities. While the Afrocentric paradigm establishes the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research, Afrocentric theory provides the analytical concepts through which the relationship between Western Knowledge Systems (WKS) and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) is examined in the Edendale community.

Central to Afrocentric theory is the assertion that African people must be recognised as agents rather than objects of knowledge. Asante (1987, 1998) argues that much of the knowledge produced about Africa has historically been mediated through Eurocentric epistemologies that marginalise African voices, distort Indigenous realities, and deny Africans the authority to define their own experiences. Afrocentric theory, therefore, seeks to relocate African cultural logic, historical consciousness, and intellectual traditions to the centre of inquiry, enabling African phenomena to be interpreted according to their own ontological and epistemological foundations rather than through externally imposed frameworks (Asante, 2003; Mazama, 2001). This repositioning is fundamental to challenging epistemic domination and advancing epistemic sovereignty within African knowledge production.

To ensure conceptual clarity, this study differentiates four closely related concepts. Afrocentrism refers to the broader intellectual, cultural, historical, and political movement that advocates centring African experiences, perspectives, and interests. Afrocentricity, as developed by Asante (1987, 1998), denotes the philosophical orientation that positions African agency, culture, and historical experiences at the centre of inquiry when examining African phenomena. The Afrocentric paradigm provides the overarching research worldview, comprising the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions that underpin the research process (Mazama, 2001; Chilisa, 2020). In contrast, Afrocentric theory supplies the analytical concepts, particularly agency, location, and cultural centredness, that inform the interpretation of the empirical data. Accordingly, the paradigm shapes the study's overall research design and methodological approach, whereas the theory guides the analysis and interpretation of participants' narratives. Importantly, Afrocentric theory does not reject knowledge originating outside Africa. Rather, it challenges the historical hegemony of Western epistemologies that have claimed universal authority while marginalising or subordinating Indigenous African knowledge systems (Asante, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni,

2018). This distinction is particularly significant in Edendale, a community whose historical development was profoundly shaped by colonial administration and Christian missionary activity. Within this context, European-derived educational, religious, and administrative institutions systematically privileged Western knowledge while delegitimising African Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Applying Afrocentric theory, therefore, serves not as an essentialist rejection of Western knowledge but as a corrective analytical framework that enables a critical examination of how AIKS have been suppressed, transformed, negotiated, resisted, and reclaimed under conditions of coloniality and its enduring legacies. The application of Afrocentric theory in this study is operationalised through three interrelated concepts: agency, location, and cultural centredness. Together, these concepts provide the analytical lens through which participants' experiences and interpretations of the interaction between Western Knowledge Systems and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Edendale are understood.

4.3.1 Agency

The principle of agency is central to Grey's definition of Afrocentricity as:

> An idea and a perspective which holds that African people can and should see, study, interpret, and interact with people, life, and reality from the vantage point of African people rather than from the vantage point of European people, Asian, or other non-African people, or from the vantage point of African people who are alienated from Africanness. (p. 3)

To do this, the agency of African people has to be fully recognised. In alignment with this, Asante (1987) maintains that Afrocentric theory positions African people as subjects of history rather than objects of study. This orientation is directly relevant to this study's concern with understanding the impacts of the Western knowledge system on AIKS and how the Edendale community has responded to such impacts. Viewing Edendale through an Afrocentric lens highlights that community members were not passive recipients of colonial knowledge but active agents who negotiated, reinterpreted, and sustained Indigenous epistemologies within a context of domination. The subtle continuities in Indigenous knowledge practices, whether in healing, moral education, or communal governance, are thus understood as acts of epistemic resilience that affirm African subjectivity. In this way, the theoretical framework underscores agency as a defining element in the endurance and transformation of Indigenous knowledge within the Edendale context.

4.3.2 Location

Location refers to the epistemological stance that knowledge must be interpreted from the vantage point of those who produced or lived it (Asante, 1988). This principle challenges the universalising claims of Western theory, which often treats African experiences as deviant or deficient. Applied to Edendale, it means rejecting the assumption that the community's knowledge landscape is "African" by default. As noted in Chapter Two, Edendale was not a pre-colonial African society, but a colonial creation, a Christianised, administratively managed settlement where African identities were fragmented and epistemically displaced. Thus, the framework compels a more precise question: From which location are we interpreting knowledge practices in Edendale? The answer is from the standpoint of those who seek to reclaim, reconstruct, or resist epistemic erasure, even within a hybridised, colonially structured space.

4.3.3 Cultural centeredness

This principle asserts that African cultural logic, embodied in values such as *Ubuntu* (humanness through relationality), communal responsibility, and spiritual interconnectedness, should serve as the reference point for meaning-making (Mazama, 2003; Ramose, 2005). *Ubuntu*, in particular, is not invoked as a romantic ideal but as an analytical category that shapes how knowledge is validated. While scholars such as Diop (1974), Nkrumah (1965), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) have contributed to the broader discourse on African epistemology and liberation, their work informs rather than constitutes the framework itself. Their ideas are critically and contextually engaged, rather than presented as biographical background. The following section expands on a key dimension of this framework: the triad of learning, unlearning, and relearning, which offers a dynamic model for epistemic transformation and positions this study within the decolonial project of knowledge reclamation.

4.4 Learning, Unlearning, and Relearning

The learning, unlearning, and relearning model (see Figure 4-1), developed as part of this study, serves as an operational expression of Afrocentricity. While Afrocentric theory provides the philosophical grounding for centring African epistemologies, the learning-unlearning-relearning triad functions as an Afrocentric learning theory. It offers a theoretical explanation of how individuals and communities engage with knowledge under conditions of

epistemic domination, describing learning as the internalisation of colonial frameworks, unlearning as the critical deconstruction of those frameworks, and relearning as the active reconstruction of African epistemologies for contemporary life. As such, the triad is not merely an interpretive lens but a dynamic model of epistemic transformation that conceptualises learning as a decolonial process.

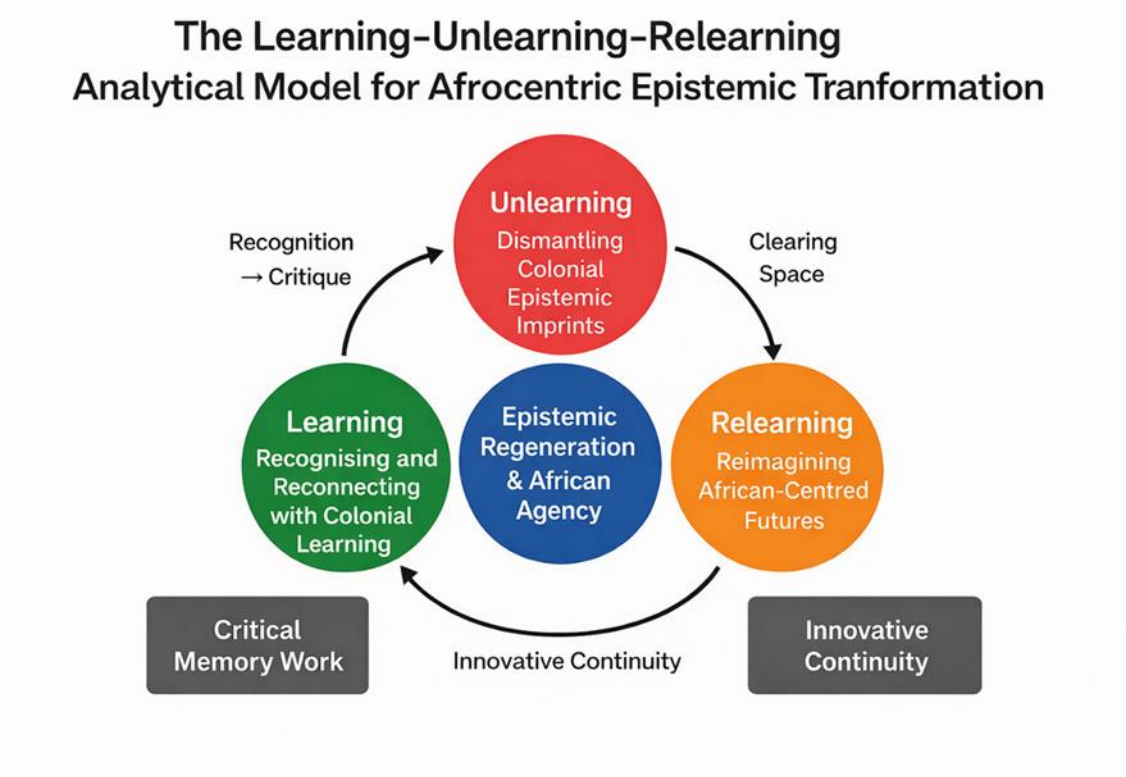


Figure 4.1: Afrocentrism as a learning theory

It activates the core Afrocentric principles of agency, location, and cultural centredness by enabling a recursive movement between interrogating internalised colonial logics, reclaiming suppressed knowledge, and reconstructing knowledge for contemporary relevance. In this way, the triad serves as the methodological mechanism by which Afrocentricism, as a theoretical framework, is applied to analyse the experiences of the Edendale community. Building on Asante's (1995) assertion that African people have been "decentred", removed from their cultural and intellectual foundations, this framework treats learning, unlearning, and relearning as corrective processes that restore epistemic coherence. They are not linear stages but recursive, co-emergent acts of epistemic reclamation that occur simultaneously in the ways knowledge holders narrate their lives, resist silencing, and reimagine futures. In Edendale, where African identities were fragmented and indigenous knowledge systems systematically devalued, this triad provides the necessary analytical machinery to interpret

how African ways of knowing survive, adapt, and assert themselves despite systemic erasure. The following subsections develop each process not as a standalone concept, but as a theoretical lens for interpreting data.

4.4.1 Learning as an epistemic condition within an Afrocentric framework

Within this study, Afrocentrism is approached as both a theoretical position and an epistemic movement and process that originates from historically conditioned forms of learning. Learning, in this sense, refers to the initial encounter with knowledge shaped by colonial and missionary frameworks, through which African ways of knowing were interpreted, reordered, and frequently misrecognised. Afrocentric theory becomes relevant precisely because it insists that such learning cannot be taken at face value but must be critically confronted to recover suppressed epistemic possibilities (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Chawene, 2016). From an Afrocentric perspective, learning initiates a process of self-confrontation in which inherited epistemic assumptions about humanity, knowledge, and value are rendered visible. As Hlela (2017) argues, learning in African contexts is inseparable from questions of personhood and humanisation. This makes learning analytically significant not because it restores African knowledge, but because it exposes the limits imposed on African humanity through colonial epistemic orders.

In this study, learning is therefore understood as the starting point of a broader epistemic journey through which the psychological, cultural, and social effects of colonisation become intelligible. These effects are not external to knowledge but are embedded within what was learned about Africa, Africans, and African ways of knowing. Confronting this learning makes visible how colonial epistemology sustained a hierarchy of being in which Western subjects were positioned as fully human. In contrast, African subjects were rendered conceptually marginal or incomplete (Gordon, 2011). Learning thus reveals the epistemic foundations of conceptual otherness. By engaging critically with this initial learning, space is created to recognise what endured beneath colonial interpretation. For example, when elders in Edendale recount ancestral ecological calendars or employ isiZulu proverbs for moral instruction within Christian contexts, these practices are not read through colonial categories that once framed them as informal or derivative. Instead, the learning that produced such misreadings is held in suspension, allowing these accounts to be approached as traces of coherent African epistemic logics that persisted despite epistemic constraint (Hlela, 2017).

Learning, therefore, does not mark the recovery of African knowledge itself; it marks the epistemic condition that makes such recovery necessary. Within an Afrocentric framework, learning becomes the site where inherited epistemic limits are confronted, enabling African knowledge systems to be re-approached as legitimate sources for interpreting both historical experience and contemporary life in Edendale.

4.4.2 Unlearning: Confronting internalised coloniality

Unlearning, in this framework, is the critical deconstruction of internalised colonial logics (i.e. what was 'learned') that have shaped self-perception, language, and knowledge validation in Edendale. As Adeate and Sewchurran (2023) emphasise, unlearning is not merely intellectual; it engages the emotional and psychological dimensions of epistemic alienation, how colonial education, religion, and governance taught African people to distrust their own ways of knowing. As Murrey et al. (2023) note, unlearning does not entail rejecting all colonial influence; it involves critically interrogating which norms, categories, and hierarchies were imposed and how they continue to operate unconsciously. Theoretically, unlearning reveals:

- The mechanisms of epistemicide: how colonial systems delegitimised AIKS through education, land dispossession, and religious conversion.
- The lingering logics of coloniality: how language, behaviour, and self-concept continue to reflect colonial imprints.
- The conditions for epistemic reclamation: by exposing what must be dismantled, unlearning clears space for African knowledge to reassert itself.

Thus, unlearning is not rejection; it is epistemic detoxification, a necessary step toward recentering African ways of knowing.

4.4.3 Relearning: Envisioning epistemic regeneration

Relearning is the active, creative reconstruction of knowledge frameworks that integrate ancestral wisdom with contemporary realities. It moves beyond recovery or critique toward adaptive innovation, reimagining what African epistemologies can become in the present. As Sarfo-Mensah (2024) argue, relearning fosters cultural pride, positive self-concept, and agency, countering the psychological impacts of epistemic marginalisation. As Chilisa and Preece (2004) describe, this is a "learning to become" process that redefines self and community through African-centred epistemologies in a globalised world. Ngũgĩ wa

Thiong'o (2000) refers to this as "decolonising the mind", a shift from epistemic unfreedom to freedom. Relearning embodies this shift not as a return, but as a forward-looking recentering. It asks: What would Edendale look like if its knowledge systems were grounded in African epistemologies, even within its hybrid reality? Analytically, relearning identifies:

- Epistemic agency concerns how knowledge holders actively reshape knowledge to foster resilience and self-determination.
- Innovative continuity, where AIKS evolve to meet contemporary challenges without losing their ethical and cultural core.
- Future-oriented reclamation, where knowledge is not just preserved but reconstructed for community well-being.

Thus, relearning is not restoration; it is epistemic regeneration. The dynamic triad of learning, unlearning, and relearning not only informs data interpretation but also reflects the need for the research process itself to be transformative, a journey shared by both knowledge holders and the researcher, as I discuss in Chapter Five.

While this study engages with the language of epistemic justice, particularly Santos's (2014) critique of the "abyssal line" that excludes non-Western knowledges, it ultimately aligns more closely with the decolonial project as articulated by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Mignolo (2017). Epistemic justice, as framed by Fricker (2007) and extended by Santos, primarily seeks the recognition and inclusion of marginalised knowledges within existing epistemic frameworks. Decoloniality, by contrast, demands not inclusion but epistemic sovereignty: the right of African communities to define knowledge on their own terms, from their own cosmological centres, without requiring validation from Western institutions. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) insists, liberation requires not just adding African voices to the curriculum but dismantling the curriculum's colonial architecture altogether. This study embraces the latter stance. The Learning-Unlearning-Relearning Model is not a plea for representation; it is a blueprint for intellectual self-definition – a move from epistemic dependency to what Hlela (2018) calls "freedom from non-freedom". In this sense, the goal is not to make space for AIKS within Western paradigms, but to recentre AIKS as the paradigm itself.

4.5 Critical Perspectives on Afrocentricity

Afrocentricity, as a formal and self-conscious theoretical paradigm, was articulated by Molefi Kete Asante in the United States during the 1970s-1980s, most notably through

Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change (1980) and *The Afrocentric Idea* (1987). Ama Mazama (2001), however, cautions against the retroactive tendency to designate earlier African and African diasporic intellectual traditions as Afrocentric in a formal sense, stressing the importance of conceptual precision. As she observes, "Everybody under the sun who had something constructive to say about African people is then casually labelled Afrocentric, from David Walker to Kwame Nkrumah" (Mazama, 2001, p. 394). While Afrocentricity did not exist as a coherent paradigm (and thus no Afrocentric theories) prior to Asante's intervention, its emergence was shaped by longstanding twentieth-century struggles against colonialism, racial domination, and epistemic erasure that foregrounded African agency and the reclamation of African knowledge systems.

Earlier thinkers articulated foundational critiques of Western epistemic dominance: W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) exposed the psychological and cultural violence of double consciousness under white supremacy; Carter G. Woodson (1933) identified the "mis-education" of Black people as a mechanism of colonial alienation; Kwame Nkrumah (1964) advanced the notion of an African personality rooted in philosophical self-reliance and ideological decolonisation; and Cheikh Anta Diop (1974) challenged Eurocentric historiography by re-situating ancient Egypt within African civilisation. Mazama (2001) maintains that it was Asante who systematised these dispersed intellectual concerns into a coherent paradigm, establishing the centrality of the African experience as an operational scientific principle. This marked a decisive shift from fragmented assertions of African dignity toward a unified epistemological framework aimed at African liberation and epistemic re-centring. It is on this basis that Afrocentric theories are constructed.

Asante synthesised these emancipatory currents into a coherent epistemological stance that positioned African peoples as subjects rather than objects of history and knowledge. While this framework proved transformative in African American contexts shaped by racialisation and systemic exclusion, its application to the African continent, where colonial, postcolonial, and indigenous knowledge systems intersect through distinct historical, ethnic, and political trajectories, has drawn sustained and nuanced critique from African scholars such as Mudimbe (1988), Oyěwùmí (1997), and Diagne (2021). These concerns do not invalidate Afrocentricity but call for reflexive, context-sensitive adaptation. This section addresses four interrelated critiques that inform the application of the theory in this study.

The first and most recurrent concern centres on essentialism, the tendency to construct "Africanness" as singular, static, or homogeneous. Scholars such as Oyěwùmí (1997) caution

that universalising claims about African culture often obscure internal diversities of gender, ethnicity, language, and epistemology. Molefe (2021) further argues that Afrocentric discourse can inadvertently homogenise the continent's rich pluralism, implying a monolithic African identity that erases regional and historical specificities. A related but distinct critique focuses on the disjuncture between context and content. Diagne (2021) and Oyěwùmí (2023) highlight a foundational tension: Afrocentricity emerged from the African American experience of racialisation, a context defined by anti-Blackness, cultural erasure, and the struggle for visibility within a settler-colonial society. In contrast, knowledge production on the African continent is shaped by different historical forces, including direct and indirect colonial rule, ethnic pluralism, post-independence state formation, and internal power dynamics. As such, uncritical transposition of a diasporically forged framework risks imposing an external narrative onto African communities whose epistemic realities are structured by logics of domination and resistance that differ significantly from the African American experience. I would argue that these concerns do not invalidate Afrocentricity but call for reflexive, context-sensitive adaptation.

A second cluster of critiques addresses the idealisation of precolonial knowledge systems. Ake (1981) warns that early Afrocentric formulations sometimes romanticise the precolonial past, neglecting internal hierarchies, contradictions, or historical change. Pellebon (2007) adds that overemphasis on traditional epistemologies may be misconstrued as resistance to modernity or innovation. However, this misreading conflates preservation with stasis. Contemporary Afrocentric scholars, including Mazama (2001), clarify that the framework does not reject change but insists that innovation be rooted in African intellectual sovereignty, allowing communities to engage globally without epistemic dependency.

Thirdly, Afrocentricity has been critiqued for its gendered blind spots. Mama (2003) observes that male-dominated articulations of African identity can marginalise women's epistemologies and reproduce patriarchal norms under the guise of cultural authenticity. Nnaemeka (2005) similarly cautions against equating "culture" with fixed tradition, urging a focus instead on African women as active agents of cultural negotiation and knowledge production. These insights underscore the necessity of deliberately centring women as this study does within epistemic recovery. Finally, scholars such as Breidlid (2009) and Hountondji (1997) question the binary framing of African versus Western knowledge systems. While the critique of Eurocentrism remains vital, rigid oppositions can obscure the hybrid, syncretic realities of lived experience and limit possibilities for cross-epistemic

dialogue. Wiredu (1996) instead advocates for “conversational philosophy”, in which African knowledge systems engage critically but not subordinately with global ideas.

This study engages these critiques as vital contributions that inform a more nuanced and reflexive enactment of Afrocentricity. Afrocentricity is therefore applied not as a fixed doctrine but as a flexible, reflexive orientation attuned to Edendale’s historical complexity, internal diversity, and epistemic hybridity. The analysis avoids essentialism by foregrounding the plural, adaptive nature of AIKS as they are lived and interpreted by diverse knowledge holders. It rejects rigid binaries by recognising Edendale as a contact zone – a space where African and Western epistemologies coexist, contest, and sometimes co-constitute one another. In this way, the study honours the emancipatory promise of Afrocentricity while remaining accountable to the intellectual rigour and contextual specificity demanded by African scholarship.

4.6 Relevance of Afrocentric Theory to this study

Afrocentric theory is epistemologically necessary for investigating the dynamics of knowledge in Edendale. The community, as discussed in Chapter Three, was established under missionary administration as part of a broader strategy to Christianise, control, and reshape African life. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1993) argues, such interventions enacted epistemicide, the systematic erasure of African knowledge through linguistic suppression, religious condemnation, and the devaluation of oral traditions. Colonial archives and official histories of Edendale reflect this imposition, foregrounding mission schools, church hierarchies, and state-appointed structures while marginalising the informal networks through which elders transmitted healing practices, ecological knowledge, and kinship ethics.

In this context, Afrocentric theory does not seek to recover a pristine or idealised past but rather provides a lens to examine how African agency has persisted, adapted, and regenerated within a contested epistemic terrain. It frames Edendale as a contact zone, a space where African and Western knowledge systems encounter, conflict, and co-constitute one another without assuming assimilation or loss. The theory thus enables this study to explore how community members retain, negotiate, and reimagine AIKS in response to ongoing colonial legacies. Crucially, it centres African subjectivity and illuminates the processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning through which epistemic reclamation unfolds.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has established Afrocentric theory as the central framework guiding this study. By foregrounding African agency, epistemic sovereignty, and cultural centredness, Afrocentricity provides a critical lens for examining the historical and ongoing interactions between Western knowledge systems and AIKS in Edendale. Emerging from African American intellectual resistance to Eurocentrism, the theory is here applied in a continental context with careful attention to local specificity, internal diversity, and historical complexity. Central to this application is the learning-unlearning-relearning triad, which functions not as a descriptive summary but as an Afrocentric learning theory that informs the conceptualisation of epistemic transformation. This triad offers a dynamic structure for interpreting how knowledge holders navigate epistemic disruption without assuming restoration, purity, or loss.

The chapter has also engaged key critiques of Afrocentricity, particularly concerns about essentialism, diasporic origins, gendered omissions, and epistemic binaries – and demonstrated how this study responds through a reflexive, non-reductive application. Rather than treating Afrocentricity as a fixed template, the research employs it as a flexible orientation that honours African subjectivity while remaining attentive to hybridity, contestation, and change. Collectively, these theoretical commitments provide the foundation for the methodological choices and analytical procedures outlined in Chapter Five. They ensure that the entire research process, from engagement with knowledge holders to interpretation of narratives, remains anchored in African-centred ways of knowing, seeing, and being.

Research Design

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the theoretical foundations for an Afrocentric approach to the dominance of Western knowledge systems over AIKS. It established Afrocentric theory as the appropriate framework for understanding and interpreting the data generated in this study. Building on this foundation, this chapter positions Afrocentricity as the guiding research paradigm, ensuring that the study remains rooted in African-centred perspectives. Afrocentricity provides a methodological approach that prioritises cultural authenticity, empowerment, and the humanisation of the African person. This chapter operationalises the argument that Edendale's history of layered epistemic displacement through pre-settlement enculturation, spatial dispossession, and demographic fragmentation, as discussed in Chapter Three, necessitates decolonial rehumanisation through an Afrocentric paradigm, centring African epistemic agency as integral to the research process.

The Afrocentric paradigm, according to Thabede (2005), is essential in any attempt to address Eurocentric coloniality as it upholds the beliefs, values, traditions, morals, and taboos central to African life elements often marginalised by Western-centric methodologies. This chapter begins with a discussion on research paradigms in general, followed by a discussion of the Afrocentric research paradigm that underpins the study. It then outlines the qualitative research approach and the participatory and case study styles that guide the research process. The chapter further explains the sampling procedures, highlighting the use of purposive and snowball sampling to identify relevant knowledge holders. It also details the data generation methods, which included document analysis, oral history, and participatory data generation methods such as the Transect Walk and the River of Life. The chapter concludes by describing the use of both inductive and deductive analytical approaches and reflecting on the ethical principles that informed the entire research process.

5.2 Afrocentric Research Paradigm

Researchers have explored various perspectives on the research process, collectively contributing to a broader understanding of how knowledge is acquired. One influential perspective, articulated by Mertens (2005) and Lodico et al. (2010), defines research as a

systematic process of inquiry involving the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to deepen understanding and provide evidence-based solutions to real-world challenges. However, research is neither neutral nor purely technical. It is fundamentally shaped by paradigms that influence every stage of inquiry, from the formulation of research questions to the interpretation of findings. Paradigms function as conceptual lenses through which researchers perceive reality, construct knowledge, and determine appropriate methodological approaches.

The concept of a paradigm, derived from the Greek word *paradeigma*, meaning "pattern", was introduced into research methodology by Thomas Kuhn (1962) to describe the shared conceptual frameworks that govern scientific communities. Within the literature, paradigms are understood as broad frameworks that integrate ontological assumptions about the nature of reality, epistemological beliefs about what constitutes valid knowledge, and methodological commitments regarding how knowledge is generated (Denzin, 2018; Khatri, 2020; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Mertens, 2005). As such, paradigms organise scholarly inquiry, structure problem-solving, and stabilise disciplinary thought. Kuhn (1962) further distinguished between two interrelated dimensions of a paradigm: the cognitive and the structural. He argued that the cognitive dimension comprises three intertwined levels: the metaphysical level encompasses shared assumptions about reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology); the sociological level refers to the norms, values, and practices that govern the disciplinary community; the level of exemplars consists of concrete models, case studies, or problem-solving traditions that demonstrate how theories are applied in practice. The structural dimension, by contrast, refers to the institutional organisation of scientific communities, including systems of training, publication, professional networks, and mechanisms of validation. Together, these cognitive and structural elements form the foundation of what Kuhn termed "normal science", operating within a stable framework until anomalies accumulate and precipitate a paradigm shift.

While Kuhn's formulation has been highly influential, it emerged from and largely reflects Western scientific traditions, which have historically shaped dominant modes of knowledge production. Ama Mazama (2001) advances a seminal argument that Afrocentrism constitutes a paradigm in its own right. Building on Molefi Kete Asante's (1991) foundational articulation of Afrocentricity, Mazama situates Afrocentrism firmly within broader methodological and philosophical debates about paradigms. Engaging directly with Kuhn's framework, Mazama acknowledges its cognitive and structural components, shared

principles, interpretive models, metaphysical assumptions, and disciplinary organisation. However, argues that it remains incomplete from an Afrocentric standpoint. She therefore introduces a third functional dimension, asserting that knowledge must not only explain or interpret reality but also actively transform it.

Drawing on ancient Kemetic traditions, Mazama invokes the ritual of the "opening of the mouth", performed by priests to restore life to statues, as a metaphor for knowledge production. Within this worldview, ideas acquire meaning only when they are activated in lived reality. Knowledge must therefore be functional, capable of restoring, sustaining, and advancing human life. Mazama further critiques Kuhn's limited conception of the cognitive domain, arguing that from an Afrocentric perspective, cognition cannot be separated from feeling and action. Consequently, the affective and conative dimensions must be recognised as integral to any paradigm grounded in African ontology and epistemology. These additions reflect an African worldview in which being, feeling, knowing, and acting are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. Mazama (2001) proposes that the Afrocentric paradigm operates through the dynamic interplay of three integrated yet distinct dimensions: the cognitive, affective, and conative. These dimensions are grounded in African cosmology and unified through spirituality, which serves as their metaphysical foundation (Schiele, 2017). Rather than functioning as abstract analytical categories, these dimensions represent lived orientations that shape how knowledge is produced, experienced, and enacted. As will be seen, the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the Afrocentric paradigm rest on much of what I discussed about AIKS in Chapter Two.

Ontologically, the Afrocentric paradigm affirms that reality is relational, interdependent, and spiritually infused. It is rooted in the African worldview of *Ubuntu*, "I am because we are," which understands human existence as constituted by community, ancestry, and ongoing relationships with the natural and metaphysical worlds. This ontology rejects atomistic and mechanistic models of being, positioning the individual instead as embedded within a web of reciprocal relationships. Such an understanding necessitates a research orientation in which the researcher is not detached from the community but is situated within it, accountable to relational obligations and collective well-being.

Epistemologically, knowledge is understood as co-created through oral traditions, lived experience, memory, intuition, spirituality, and communal validation. It is neither abstract nor value-neutral; rather, it arises from the historical, cultural, and spiritual specificities of African life. Spiritual insight and ancestral wisdom are recognised as legitimate sources of

knowing alongside reason and observation. This epistemological stance challenges Western privileging of quantification and objectivity, affirming that not everything meaningful is measurable. Consequently, the Afrocentric paradigm requires dialogical, participatory, and contextually grounded methods such as oral history, Transect Walks, and narrative storytelling, in which knowledge emerges through relationship rather than extraction.

The cognitive dimension of the Afrocentric paradigm centres African epistemologies that prioritise historical consciousness, epistemic autonomy, and relational modes of knowing. Unlike Western positivist traditions that abstract knowledge from its social and cultural contexts, Afrocentric cognition situates understanding within cultural memory, ancestral wisdom, spirituality, and communal dialogue (Asante, 1987). Kambon (2015) asserts that valid knowledge must align with an African worldview in which reality is spiritually grounded and communally constituted. Nkulu wa Ntanda (2010) further emphasises that African cognition is inherently interdisciplinary, integrating ecology, ethics, ancestry, and spirituality into a unified epistemic fabric, and rejecting the fragmentation of knowledge into isolated disciplines.

The affective dimension attends to the emotional, cultural, and identity-based aspects of knowledge production. Learning is understood not merely as an intellectual process but as deeply intertwined with belonging, dignity, and cultural affirmation (Mazama, 2001). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) illustrates how colonial education severed deep emotional ties to language, land, and identity, resulting in profound cultural and psychological dislocation. Healing this rupture necessitates what Mama (2003) terms emotional decolonisation—a restorative process wherein reconnecting with cultural identity fosters healing, resistance, and epistemic renewal. The conative dimension foregrounds action, transformation, and the ethical imperative to apply knowledge in the service of collective well-being. Afrocentric knowledge, as Mazama (2001) emphasises, is never inert; it is oriented toward advocacy, healing, and community regeneration. This orientation resonates with Freire's (1970) concept of praxis – the unity of reflection and action – while remaining firmly rooted in African liberation thought. Tamale (2020) similarly insists that African knowledge must "do work" in the world by feeding, healing, governing, and liberating communities. Gruenewald (2008, p. 319) reinforces this position by arguing that Afrocentric research seeks the recovery and renewal of traditional, non-commodified African cultural patterns not merely for preservation but for active regeneration.

Crucially, spirituality weaves the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions into a coherent whole. Schiele (2017) and Paris (1995) describe this integration as a "sacred cosmos" within which knowledge, ethics, and action emerge from recognition of the divine presence in community and nature. Within this metaphysical framework, research is understood not as the neutral extraction of data but as a moral and spiritual practice that honours both the integrity of the knowledge holder and the knowledge itself. In addition to these dimensions, Mazama (2001) foregrounds the structural level, which addresses the social conditions under which knowledge is produced. This level recognises that historical experience, power relations, and communal values shape epistemic processes. It establishes a disciplinary matrix rooted in African identity, foregrounding collective memory, oral traditions, and intergenerational transmission as central mechanisms of knowledge production.

The functional dimension unique to the Afrocentric paradigm insists that knowledge must be liberatory and regenerative. Knowledge is thus conceived as a living force that unites thought, spirit, and community. Within this expanded paradigm, exemplars function as practical frameworks that guide inquiry in specific contexts. As Mazama (2001) and Sakala (2024) note, Afrocentric exemplars draw on African-centred methodologies such as oral history, participatory research, and Indigenous storytelling. Mazama (2001) further articulates seven guiding principles that define the Afrocentric paradigm and inform the orientation of this study: the African experience must guide all inquiry; spirituality must be given due importance; immersion and participatory engagement are essential; holism is fundamental; intuition must complement rationality; not all significant knowledge is measurable; and knowledge must be liberating, actively challenging epistemic domination and affirming Indigenous wisdom.

Axiologically, Afrocentric research is inherently moral and political. It is driven by a commitment to justice, liberation, and the rehumanisation of African people after centuries of epistemic and ontological devaluation. Drawing on the liberatory philosophies of Fanon (1968), Biko (1978), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1993), the paradigm positions knowledge production as an act of resistance and a pathway to intellectual self-definition. Ethical quality, as Reviere (2005) argues, is measured through adherence to African moral principles such as *ukweli* (truth rooted in community), *ujamaa* (communal solidarity), *kujitoa* (committed service), *utulivu* (justice), and *uhaki* (harmony and fairness). These values require the researcher to act as an advocate for holism, dignity, cultural pride, and collective agency.

Operating within the Afrocentric paradigm required this study to engage knowledge across its functional, cognitive, affective, structural, and axiological dimensions. Functionally, the paradigm demanded that research serve as a vehicle for learning, unlearning, and relearning, requiring critical interrogation of Western epistemic dominance alongside active validation of AIKS. The lived experiences of the Edendale community were positioned as foundational rather than supplementary to inquiry. Cognitively and affectively, the paradigm required research methods that honoured African ways of knowing while attending to the emotional consequences of colonial harm. Participatory processes ensured that community knowledge holders acted as co-creators of knowledge rather than research subjects. This orientation justified the use of oral history interviews and historical mapping with elders as acts of epistemic restoration, while shaping relational ethics grounded in trust, reciprocity, and culturally familiar spaces of engagement. Structurally, the paradigm necessitated collaboration among scholars, educators, and community members committed to African-centred epistemologies. Knowledge production was organised through dialogical and relational processes that respected local authority, experience, and interpretive frameworks. Community members were engaged as knowledge holders and co-producers of meaning, ensuring that African voices shaped all phases of the research process. Analytically and ethically, this required sustained attentiveness to power, voice, and agency.

Ultimately, because the Afrocentric paradigm positions knowledge as a living and transformative force, this study understood research as an act of remembering – the deliberate recovery and re-centring of fragmented histories, the resistance to epistemic dislocation, and the reclaiming of African wisdom as central to knowledge production. In alignment with Hlela's (2018) framing of the African journey from freedom to non-freedom and back to freedom, the study acknowledged the enduring impacts of coloniality while affirming collective identity, nurturing self-worth, and engaging AIKS as living traditions grounded in respect, reciprocity, and responsibility.

Table 5.1: Humanisation of the African person within the Afrocentric Paradigm

Afrocentric Paradigm	
Aim of research	Humanisation of the African persons---Cultural image and interest of African people
Research position	Axiology: research as moral and political
Nature of social reality	African reality is *Ubuntu*
Nature of knowledge	Knowledge is created by collective identity, nature & spirituality.

Methodology	Action research and participatory research emphasise learning
Theory looks like	A journey of learning, unlearning to relearning, and dehumanisation to humanisation
An explanation is valid if …	The life experiences, history and traditions of African people are at the centre of analysis.
Voice of the researcher	Advocates for holism; not everything that matters is measurable.
Ethics and Quality criteria	*ukweli* (community embeddedness) and *ujamaa* (communal belonging and unity), *kujitoa* (value-based commitment), *utulivu* (justice), and *uhaki* (harmony, fairness)

The table illustrates how the Afrocentric paradigm frames research as a process of humanisation, where inquiry restores the dignity, agency, and voice of African people.

5.3 Research Approach

A research approach serves as the foundational framework that guides the overall design, methodology, and execution of a study. As Yearsley (2023) notes, it encompasses the strategies, techniques, and procedures for identifying, analysing, and interpreting data relevant to a particular research focus. Broadly, research approaches are classified into three main types: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Each of these approaches offers distinct ways of investigating phenomena. Quantitative research, as discussed by Trochim and Donnelly (2016) and Neustadtl and Babbie (2020), is traditionally grounded in positivist and post-positivist paradigms. It assumes that reality is objective and can be systematically measured through empirical observation.

This approach is characterised by hypothesis testing, deductive reasoning, statistical analysis, and the identification of patterns, relationships, and predictive trends. Methods such as experiments, surveys, and structured observations are commonly employed to collect numerical data while maintaining 'objectivity' and minimising researcher bias (Creswell, 2018; Neustadtl & Babbie, 2020; Clark et al., 2021). However, quantitative methods are not limited to positivist traditions. When positioned within a critical paradigm, they extend beyond mere description to serve a more transformative purpose. Frisby (2024) highlights that statistical findings, when examined within broader cultural, historical, and political contexts, can be powerful tools for challenging dominant ideologies and advocating for social change.

Qualitative research examines how individuals perceive and make sense of their social environments. Recognising reality as socially constructed, this approach employs inductive reasoning and flexible methods, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, to capture depth and nuance in human experience, rather than relying on numerical measurement (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021; Perry, 2022; Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015).

Although qualitative research offers deep, contextual insights into human behaviour and social processes, it also presents challenges. Mohajan (2018) observes that qualitative studies can be time-consuming, open to researcher bias, and their findings are often not easily generalisable beyond the specific context of the study. By comparison, Creswell and Clark (2023) and Mackey and Bryfonski (2018) describe mixed methods research as an approach that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to enhance validity and triangulation, though they caution that it is complex, resource-intensive, and demanding to integrate and analyse diverse data.

This study employed a qualitative approach, as it is well-suited to investigating African perspectives within the cultural context of Edendale. Through qualitative inquiry, I explored how community members interpreted and transmitted indigenous knowledge and how historical and social factors shaped their understandings. The approach enabled the research team and me to listen to the voices of knowledge holders and document lived realities in a manner that reflected their own meanings and values. Furthermore, qualitative research resonates strongly with the Afrocentric paradigm. Harding, as cited in Mkabela (2015), explains that the Afrocentric paradigm aligns naturally with qualitative research because both value reflexivity, collaboration, and responsiveness to cultural context. In this view, the researcher is not a distant or invisible observer but an active participant in the process of knowledge generation. My own role in this study reflected this principle: I positioned myself as a historical individual whose experiences and values shaped my engagement with the research, while remaining attentive to the collective voices of the knowledge holders. In line with May's (2002) argument that qualitative research focuses on understanding how individuals construct and interpret their experiences, this study sought to comprehend how the Edendale community made sense of Indigenous knowledge and its transformation over time.

5.4 Research Style

This study employed a combination of participatory and case study research methods. A case study is an "approach that allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of a specific situation, event, or entity" (Rule & John, 2011, p. 5). Within qualitative research, a case study involves an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon (Corcoran et al., 2004). In this study, the case was the African community of Edendale**,** a settlement shaped by both colonial intrusion and enduring coloniality. The study examined how Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Edendale have historically been produced, transmitted, and sustained, and how they have been negotiated, contested, and often marginalised in the face of Western epistemic dominance, reflecting Epprecht's (2008) assertion that knowledge is never static but always a site of negotiation and power. Depending on its purpose, a case study can be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive, providing insight into the research focus (Yin, 2013). As understood by Hardwick (2017), Innes et al. (2000), and Shishkov (2019), exploratory case studies are employed to investigate a phenomenon in its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. They are often employed as a preliminary step to identify research questions and hypotheses for further study. This type of case study is particularly useful when prior research is limited, as it allows researchers to gather insights and develop a framework for more detailed research (Innes et al., 2000; Yin, 1993).

Building upon exploratory research, descriptive case studies offer a more detailed account of a specific phenomenon within its context. They focus on describing the characteristics and functions of the subject/case being studied, often answering the "what" questions. This type of case study is beneficial for documenting and understanding complex processes or events, providing a comprehensive overview that can inform further research or practice (Shishkov, 2019). Fisher and Ziviani (2004) explain that explanatory case studies are designed to examine causal relationships, addressing the "how" and "why" questions. This approach is particularly valuable in fields like business, public policy, and health sciences, where understanding causal pathways is crucial for developing effective interventions (Innes et al., 2000).

An exploratory case study was more suitable for this research than other types of case studies because it investigated the impact of Western knowledge on AIKS in Edendale, a topic with limited prior research. A case study approach was particularly suited to this inquiry, as it

enabled detailed engagement with complex socio-historical processes (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). Edendale served as a theoretically informative and context-rich case that illuminates broader patterns of epistemic contestation, negotiation, and transformation.

The study moved beyond descriptive documentation to examine how different knowledge systems interacted, transformed, and produced consequences within the Edendale community. An exploratory approach was adopted to enable in-depth engagement with these relational and historical processes, recognising Edendale as a defined context in which knowledge systems are negotiated, contested, and reconstituted over time.

While a descriptive case study focuses on providing a detailed account of a phenomenon, it does not typically seek to uncover underlying mechanisms, influences, or emerging patterns. In contrast, this study explored how the Western knowledge system influenced African Indigenous knowledge, making the exploratory case study more suitable. Edendale served as a microcosm of broader African experiences. However, rather than simply describing it, the study used Edendale to investigate and gain deeper insights into the larger phenomenon of Western intellectual dominance over African knowledge systems. Thus, an exploratory approach was necessary to identify themes**,** generate new understandings**,** and lay the foundation for future research.

According to Rule and John (2011), cases are inextricably linked to their contexts and thus must be examined within a contextual framework. Here, "context" encompasses the broader environment, setting, or situation in which a case is situated, including social, cultural, economic, political, and historical factors. These factors shape the case's characteristics, behaviours, and outcomes, providing the framework within which the case operates and helping explain its nature and dynamics. They hold that the relationship between a case and its context can be understood in three main ways: as a *microcosm*, an *outlier*, and a *catalyst*. First, viewing a case as a *microcosm* means seeing it as a miniature representation of the broader context, reflecting its key characteristics, dynamics, and patterns. This perspective allows researchers to gain insights into the general principles, structures, and processes at play in the macrocosm. It emphasises that the case is not isolated but an integral part of the larger system. Secondly, considering a case as an *outlier* highlights its role as an exception to the general patterns observed in the context. Outlier cases, according to Rule and John (2011), deviate from typical characteristics or outcomes, offering valuable opportunities to identify the boundaries of existing theories, challenge dominant assumptions, and uncover the limitations of current knowledge.

Viewing a case as a *catalyst* emphasises its potential to trigger changes or transformations within the broader context. Catalytic cases introduce new ideas, practices, or technologies that disrupt existing patterns and advance innovation, thereby helping researchers understand processes of change, adaptation, and evolution in complex systems. These three perspectives are not mutually exclusive and can be applied simultaneously, depending on the research question and theoretical framework.

Within this study, Edendale was conceptualised as a microcosm that provides an in-depth exploration of Indigenous knowledge systems within a broader historical and socio-cultural framework. This study further positioned Edendale as a catalytic case, aligning with Afrocentric methodology and Lather's (1986) notion of research that challenges dominant narratives and fosters transformative understanding. A catalytic case study extends beyond mere documentation or explanation; it actively interrogates the power dynamics of knowledge production (Lather, 1986), exposing, for example, the historical and ongoing tensions between Western and African Indigenous knowledge systems. By engaging with these tensions, the study examined the broader epistemological conflicts and also highlighted the potential for intellectual and cultural reclamation within African communities. The catalytic nature of the case thus allows for a deeper exploration of epistemological imbalances, emphasising African agency in the reclamation and preservation of Indigenous knowledge.

At the heart of this research is an exploration of the Edendale community's perspectives on Indigenous Knowledge Systems. As noted in Chapter Three (the historical account of Edendale), the study presented an opportunity to generate rich data and gain an in-depth understanding of how Indigenous Knowledge Systems have evolved within this historical context. Edendale's origins as a colonial creation underscore the impact of European colonialism in Africa, illustrating the imposition of Western knowledge systems upon Indigenous populations. This historical context provides a foundation for examining how colonialism influenced the acceptance, adaptation, or resistance to Western knowledge systems in Africa.

Rule and John (2011) propose four spatial metaphors to describe context: background, foreground, liftground, and underground. These conceptual lenses provide an analytical framework for examining how multiple contextual layers simultaneously shape a case, rather than treating context as a singular or linear backdrop. Within this framework, Background refers to the historical structures and socio-historical processes that have shaped the

community's knowledge traditions, in this study, particularly the enduring legacy of colonialism. From an Afrocentric perspective, understanding context as background facilitates a critical analysis of the deeply rooted historical impacts of Western knowledge systems on AIKS.

Foreground captures the present realities actively shaping contemporary community dynamics and future developments. It highlights the evolving responses of the Edendale community to historical legacies and ongoing challenges, particularly in their efforts to reclaim and revitalise Indigenous knowledge systems. This space reflects how Indigenous knowledge today is being reasserted as a means of resilience, agency, and resistance against lingering colonial influences. Liftground represents the dominant discourse that has historically shaped mainstream knowledge production and social organisation. Within Edendale, this could reflect the colonial influences embedded in education, governance, and religious institutions.

Underground represents knowledge that persists beneath dominant structures, submerged yet enduring despite marginalisation. In the case of Edendale, this could include Indigenous knowledge systems and lived experiences that have been systematically overlooked in favour of Western epistemologies. Political leadership and official historical records may have excluded or downplayed these narratives, yet they continue to shape the community's identity and resilience. Through a critical engagement with underground narratives, this study interrogated the liftground (dominant frameworks) and elevated Indigenous perspectives that have historically been dismissed.

By applying these spatial metaphors, this study transcended the limitations of relying solely on archival records, which are often unreliable and incomplete, to amplify the voices and lived experiences of the Edendale community. This approach ensured a more holistic understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems by accounting for both dominant and suppressed layers of knowledge. Thus, the selection of Edendale as an exploratory case study not only revealed the colonial impositions embedded within its history but also provided a framework for engaging with Indigenous epistemologies that persist despite historical suppression of what Epprecht (2017, p. 12) describes as Edendale's "enduring intellectual and cultural agency" and "continuous negotiation of identity amid epistemic erasure", and what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 45) terms "epistemic resilience": the quiet yet persistent refusal of African communities to surrender intellectual sovereignty even under conditions of systemic delegitimisation.

I adopted participatory research (PR) to complement the case study design, recognising its capacity to deepen contextual understanding and honour the dynamism of community knowledge-making (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, p. 192). Situated within the Edendale History Project (EHP), my study relied on PR not only as a method but as a decolonial commitment to disrupt extractive research logics and instead co-create knowledge with, rather than about, the community. This approach proved essential for engaging with Rule and John's (2011) spatial metaphors: while colonial structures formed the liftground and historical trauma shaped the background, PR enabled the research team to carefully excavate the underground, the Indigenous knowledge, memories, and practices that had been systematically silenced.

My engagement with PR began in earnest during my first formal meeting with the EHP, when we identified a core research team from the EHP, comprising community members trained in Afrocentric research methods. The team comprised five members (two men and three women), three of whom are long-term residents of Edendale/Georgetown and two who, although from Edendale, reside elsewhere in Pietermaritzburg, with ages ranging from approximately 30 to 60 years, thereby bringing intergenerational perspectives to the research process.

who were responsible for guiding the study, coordinating activities, and supporting data collection. In keeping with an Afrocentric approach, and in particular to foster unlearning and relearning amongst ourselves, part of the research team's function was to serve as the first bridge of learning among research team members. It was thus a place of thinking, planning and learning. Before data generation commenced, I facilitated training sessions with the team grounded in Afrocentric research principles, particularly Mazama's (2001) emphasis on cultural authenticity and Reviere's (2005) canon of utility to the African community. Through these dialogues, my initial research instruments were critically reassessed. The team collectively revised the tools to better reflect Edendale's epistemic traditions, which led me to incorporate culturally resonant methods such as Transect Walks and the River of Life. Because these revisions significantly altered my original protocol, I submitted four successive ethical amendments to my university's ethics committee, a process that, while administratively demanding, affirmed our shared commitment to methodological integrity and relational accountability. These participatory methods created reflective spaces where unlearning and relearning could occur. Knowledge holders began to question internalised assumptions about the inferiority of Indigenous knowledge and reconnected with ancestral wisdom as a source of strength and self-definition.

After each stage of data generation, including the three-part oral interviews focused on personal history, community life, and Indigenous knowledge systems, I held debriefing sessions with the research team to reflect on ethical nuances, emerging themes, and our own positionalities. This process embodied Afrocentricity not as an abstract framework but as lived praxis. It centred African voices, redistributed epistemic authority, and honoured *Ubuntu's* call for humanising research relationships. Most importantly, it fostered mental liberation, enabling knowledge holders to reclaim their epistemic sovereignty and assert their cultural identity in the face of enduring Western impositions. Through PR, the silenced became audible, the marginalised moved to the foreground, and the underground rose not as relic, but as living, breathing knowledge for the future.

5.5 Sampling

Sampling in qualitative research is a methodologically intentional process of selecting information-rich cases to yield an in-depth, contextually nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Qualitative sampling prioritises epistemic relevance, ensuring that knowledge holders possess the experiential authority, cultural knowledge, or historical proximity necessary to illuminate the research focus. In this study, I employed a dual-strategy approach: purposive sampling, which entails the deliberate selection of participants based on predetermined criteria central to the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and snowball sampling, a chain-referral technique wherein initial participants assist in identifying additional informants who hold pertinent knowledge or are embedded within relevant social networks (Naderifar et al., 2017). This combined strategy was particularly suited to the study's aim of engaging recognised knowledge holders in Edendale, individuals whose intergenerational stewardship of Indigenous Knowledge Systems affords them both epistemic legitimacy and communal trust.

Although the study initially intended to include descendants of the original *amakholwa* settlers who arrived with Reverend James Allison in 1851, this proved impossible due to twentieth-century demographic shifts that displaced most settler descendants from Edendale and Georgetown – having accumulated sufficient wealth, the last remaining descendants moved into previously white-designated suburbs after the end of apartheid. As a result, it was not possible to include direct descendants of the Allison settler lineage in the study. The knowledge holders who ultimately participated were therefore drawn from families rooted in the area before missionary settlement. Their accounts reflect Indigenous epistemic traditions

that predate, intersect with, and contest missionary and colonial knowledge regimes, rather than those of the *amakholwa* settler descendants themselves.

Given the community's specific history, founded by James Allison and his followers after their break from the Wesleyan Missionary Society over the rejection of African customs such as polygamy, chieftaincy, and communal land tenure (Mkhize, 2015; Swartz, 2015), AIKS in Edendale has been profoundly reshaped by over 170 years of Christianisation and Western education. As discussed in Chapter Two, this legacy means that pre-colonial Indigenous knowledge was rarely transmitted intact; many original knowledge bearers had already converted before settling in Edendale, and their descendants either assimilated into Western traditions or relocated. Consequently, I sought participants not as custodians of "pure" African IKS but as individuals who could reflect critically on how Indigenous knowledge had been retained, transformed, suppressed, or reinterpreted within this unique historical context.

Working closely with the EHP, a collaborative initiative involving the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the Sinomlando Centre, Msunduzi Library Services, the Edendale community, and Queen's University in Canada, I began by identifying the first cohort of knowledge holders during our initial team meeting. The EHP's community ties provided an essential foundation for this process. Together, we applied purposive sampling (Mouton & Babbie, 2012; Palinkas et al., 2015) to select individuals based on their lived connection to Edendale's intergenerational memory, cultural practices, and epistemic negotiations.

While the initial sampling criteria included elders with long-standing residency, descendants of the original settlers, and faith-based community figures positioned at the intersection of Indigenous and Christian worldviews, the final sample necessarily excluded direct settler descendants. Instead, it centred Indigenous families historically rooted in the area prior to missionary settlement. I deliberately excluded non-Black residents (e.g., White or Indian community members), as their knowledge systems fall outside this study's focus on African Indigenous epistemologies.

To expand the sample beyond the initial EHP-nominated individuals, I employed snowball sampling (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Parker et al., 2019), a method in which early knowledge holders recommended others with relevant insights. This approach proved especially valuable in a community where trust and relationality shape knowledge sharing. The final sample included 10 Black African participants. Every potential knowledge holder was first contacted by phone to request a visit appointment to introduce the study. Those who expressed interest

were then visited at home to provide detailed information and obtain informed consent, steps that the research team and I agreed were essential for ethical and culturally respectful engagement. This sampling strategy reflected Afrocentric research principles, particularly Reviere's (2001) emphasis on utility to the African community and Mazama's (2001) call for cultural authenticity. Rather than seeking "ideal types" of Indigenous knowledge holders, I embraced the historical reality of Edendale: a community where AIKS persists not in isolation, but in dialogue and often tension with colonial and religious impositions. By centring those who navigate this complex epistemic terrain, the study honours the lived truth of Indigenous knowledge as it actually is, fragmented, resilient, adaptive, and deeply human.

5.6 Methods of Data Generation

This study utilised both secondary and primary data. The secondary data were drawn from archives, while the primary data were generated through oral history, the River of Life, and the Transect Walk methods. It is important to note that the chosen methods were not only about generating data but also about learning, unlearning, and relearning, as discussed below.

5.6.1 Document analysis/archival research

Document analysis is a systematic approach to reviewing and interpreting printed and electronic materials (Bowen, 2009; Morgan, 2022; Patton, 2015), enabling researchers to identify themes, uncover patterns, and critically examine historical narratives. In this study, archival research provided the foundational layer for understanding the historical evolution of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Edendale and the impact of Western knowledge systems. By engaging critically with historical records, I traced key events that shaped Edendale's trajectory from precolonial land ethics through missionary arrival, freehold acquisition, colonial backlash, and apartheid containment.

Archives are not neutral repositories of the past but contested spaces that predominantly reflect the perspectives of colonial administrators, missionaries, and state authorities. As Mbembe (2002) argues, the archive is not simply a passive storehouse of historical records but an institutional site where power is exercised through processes of selection, classification, preservation, and exclusion. What enters the archive acquires the authority of historical truth, while what is omitted or rendered invisible is often excluded from public memory. In colonial contexts, therefore, archives functioned as technologies of governance that produced and legitimised particular ways of knowing Africa, while simultaneously

marginalising alternative epistemologies. In the South African context, official records on Edendale, such as mission reports, land registers, and colonial correspondence, encode the epistemic hierarchies that marginalised AIKS by framing them as irrational, backward, or superstitious. Mbembe's conceptualisation also reminds researchers that the archive is inherently incomplete and marked by absences and silences, requiring critical interrogation rather than unquestioning acceptance. However, as scholars have shown, such archives can be critically engaged in three interrelated ways: first, through "reading against the grain" to uncover traces of African agency, resistance, and submerged worldviews; second, by recognising the emergence of alternative archives – including community memory, oral traditions, and family records – that challenge official silences; and third, by acknowledging post-apartheid efforts to reconfigure the national archive itself, notably through the systematic inclusion of oral histories and community-based documentation (Ngqoziba, 2020; SAHRC, 2016).

In this study, archival work served a dual purpose: it acted as a diagnostic tool that exposed the mechanisms of epistemic suppression embedded in colonial and missionary texts; and it enabled a critical re-reading of Edendale's past to foreground African experiences, contest silences, and illuminate the resilience, adaptability, and continuity of Indigenous Knowledge Systems within historically constrained conditions. However, as Chilisa (2012) cautions, restoring Indigenous knowledge cannot rely solely on documentary recovery; it demands the participation of those who continue to embody its living traditions. For this reason, the study employed participatory and collaborative methods, including oral history interviews, Transect Walks, and the River of Life method, which position knowledge holders as co-researchers rather than informants. These dialogical encounters enabled critical reflection, collective remembering, and the rearticulation of Indigenous values, skills, and aesthetics sustained within the community's memory.

The archives consulted include the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg), the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (KwaZulu-Natal Archives and Records Service), the Pietermaritzburg Museum Library, the Msunduzi Museum, and the Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA) platform. Many of these repositories contain materials shaped by colonial, missionary, and apartheid logics. Government files in the official archives, for instance, reflect administrative control and racialised governance; missionary records frame conversion as civilisation; and early photographs often embody an ethnographic gaze that objectifies African life. As such, these

archives are not neutral, but sites where power operates through selection, classification, and silencing. I examined state records at the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, including land files (e.g., SNA274/308, MSCE #2996/1974), Native Affairs correspondence, and municipal memoranda. These documents reveal how dispossession was often enacted not through open violence alone, but through bureaucratic deferral – petitions acknowledged but never answered, land claims recognised in principle but denied in practice. In the 1913 petition submitted by Rev. John L. Dube on behalf of evicted families (SNA274/308), for example, the state's silence exemplifies a pattern of administrative inaction that enabled systemic erasure without explicit decree.

By critically engaging with the same repositories discussed above, it became evident that they also hold traces of African agency and resistance, not because they are unbiased, but because African actors inserted their voices into them, however partially. Visual materials at the Pietermaritzburg Museum Library and Msunduzi Museum, including photographs of Edendale homesteads and early mission scenes, were noted as potential sites for deeper Afrocentric analysis. However, as I discuss in Chapter Six, such images often reflect colonial or missionary perspectives and require careful re-reading to recover African aesthetics, spatial ethics, and communal values.

At the Alan Paton Centre, I worked extensively with the Aitchison Collection, which includes the unpublished manuscripts of H. Selby Msimang – an African intellectual and Edendale descendant who reconstructed the settlement's history from community memory and oral transmission. His writings, such as "The Founding of Edendale and Historical Events Prior: Edendale", function as a counter-archive: they centre African political agency, precolonial land ethics, and the collective purchase of *Welverdiend* in 1851, directly challenging missionary and colonial narratives that frame Edendale as a product of benevolence.

The DISA platform provided access to digitised African-language newspapers such as *Ilanga laseNatal*, which articulate critiques of land alienation, educational neglect, and political exclusion. These publications offer a vital African public voice, affirming Edendale's freehold as earned through collective labour but not granted by the state. As one 1952 issue declares: "The women of Edendale sold their cattle to buy land. Why then do foreigners insist on taking our land from us?" This assertion reflects a living historical consciousness that persisted even under censorship.

Importantly, post-apartheid oral history initiatives, such as the Voices of Edendale project cited in Chapter Six (e.g., the 1998 interview with Nokuthula Dlamini), have been incorporated into some of these repositories. These testimonies help correct archival silences – particularly regarding women's contributions and intergenerational memory – and affirm that land ownership was understood as a covenant of collective effort, not a colonial gift.

In response to the limitations of these sources, Eurocentric bias, linguistic alienation, gendered exclusion, and fragmentation, I approached the archive not as a source of objective truth but as a contested terrain. Rooted in Afrocentric principles (Asante, 1987), I centred Africans as subjects of their own history. I read against the grain, treating omissions as data: the absence of ancestral spirituality in mission reports, the erasure of women from title deeds, the reduction of communal land ethics to "property". However, within these distortions, I also found acts of epistemic assertion: petitions, public declarations, benevolent societies, and the persistent invocation of 1851 as a moral and historical anchor.

Thus, archival research was not merely preparatory; it laid the epistemological foundation for the entire study. It clarified the mechanisms of colonial and apartheid containment, exposed the resilience of African self-definition, and shaped the questions I carried into community engagement. The archive, in this sense, was not an endpoint, but a threshold – one that demanded unlearning, relearning, and a commitment to co-recovery.

5.6.2 Oral history interviews

Oral history is a research method for capturing lived experiences and preserving historical narratives that exist beyond the reach of official records (Abrams, 2016; Shopes, 2011). The strength of oral history lies in its ability to capture lived experiences, personal narratives, and community memory, and to reveal how individuals interpret, remember, and give meaning to their lives within broader socio-political contexts (Portelli, 2017; Thompson, 2017). As Field (2008) and Berman (2023) argue, memory, myth, and subjectivity are not weaknesses in South African oral traditions; they are central to understanding agency, identity, and resistance. This aligns with Afrocentric epistemology, which values narrative, orality, and communal truth over detached empiricism (Asante, 1987; Mazama, 2001).

While critics question the reliability of oral testimony due to its potential bias (Batty, 2009; Jessee, 2011), Ridington (2014) and Goodchild et al. (2017) affirm that it meets rigorous standards of credibility when contextualised and reflexively managed.. In postcolonial South Africa, dismissing oral accounts risks reproducing the very epistemic violence this study

seeks to confront: the denial of African ways of knowing. By adopting an Afrocentric framework, I positioned the Edendale community as the rightful owners of their narratives. Oral history, therefore, was not extractive but reciprocal, a space for unlearning internalised inferiority and relearning the value of AIKS.

In this study, oral history served as a tool for reconstructing the past and as an epistemological act of reclamation, centring the voices of Edendale's knowledge holders as authoritative interpreters of their own histories. By documenting personal accounts of colonial disruption, Christian conversion, land dispossession, and cultural negotiation, oral history enabled me to move beyond the liftground of state and missionary archives and instead engage directly with the underground: the suppressed, resilient, and adaptive forms of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) that persist despite systemic erasure. In Edendale, where written records often silence African perspectives, oral history becomes a vital counter-archive, one that names what was lost, resists how it was distorted, and affirms how it continues.

To ensure both depth and rigour in capturing these narratives, the research process comprised an initial preparatory visit, followed by three sequential oral history interviews with each knowledge holder, a design developed in collaboration with the EHP. This multi-stage approach was not merely logistical; it was epistemologically necessary. The preparatory visit established the ethical and relational foundation of the study, while the three interviews enabled the gradual development of trust, deeper reflection, and the co-validation of emerging insights. Critically, this iterative approach supported re-remembering, the mental process of revisiting past experiences and reconstructing their meaning over time. Re-remembering differs fundamentally from retrieval (as in archival research), rather than simply recalling fixed facts, participants recreated, reflected upon, and reinterpreted their experiences with each interview, demonstrating processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning at the intrapersonal level. At the interpersonal level, the dialogical nature of the interviews also created opportunities for mutual learning, in which reflective questioning prompted new understandings for both the knowledge holder and the researcher. For example, the Research Team member might ask a reflective question that prompts a shift in perspective for the knowledge holder; the knowledge holder's response might prompt a shift in perspective for the research team member.

The initial visit focused on informed consent and relationship-building. After the initial phone contact, the team visited each participant at home to explain the study's purpose, discuss

ethical safeguards, and answer questions. This stage was critical for establishing mutual respect and ensuring that participation was fully voluntary, a principle grounded in *Ubuntu* and Reviere's (2001) canon of humanisation. The first stage of oral interview, guided by a semi-structured protocol, was also conducted during this initial visit and focused on personal life history. Knowledge holders shared their upbringing, education, religious affiliation, and key life events. These narratives revealed how colonial and missionary structures shaped individual identities, often through internalised hierarchies between civilised and traditional. The second oral interview focused on community history. Here, participants reflected on changes in leadership, land use, governance, and social cohesion in Edendale across generations. The final stage of the oral history interview centred on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and on how spiritual practices, healing knowledge, kinship systems, and ancestral memory were preserved, altered, or silenced.

After each session, a debriefing and reflection session was held with the whole research team to discuss emerging themes, ethical sensitivities, alignment with Afrocentric principles, and personal encounters during the interview. This three-phase structure addressed concerns about memory reliability not by seeking factual verification alone, but by creating conditions for reflexive remembering. Rather than treating memory as static data, I understood it as a dynamic process, which Portelli (2017, p. 65) calls "the work of memory". Triangulation occurred through cross-checking with archival data and through member checking during follow-up visits, allowing participants to confirm, correct, or expand on their earlier accounts. This iterative dialogue reinforced their role not as informants, but as co-constructors of knowledge.

Ethical integrity was paramount. Given the emotional weight of recalling forced removals, family displacement, and cultural loss, we approached each interaction with empathy, patience, and cultural humility. Consent was reaffirmed at every stage, and participants retained full control over what they chose to share. Several interviews were paused or shortened when elders expressed fatigue or distress, a reminder that research must serve people, not just produce knowledge.

5.6.4 A spatio-temporal methodology: Transect Walk and River of Life as Afrocentric practices of reclamation

The Transect Walk and River of Life (RoL) were interrelated, epistemologically grounded practices designed to reclaim Edendale's historical narrative through embodied, spatial, and

temporal ways of knowing, representing a deliberate enactment of Afrocentric research praxis. The Transect Walk originates in the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methodology (Chambers, 1994), where it was initially used as a systematic method for observing and documenting physical environments. In community-based and Indigenous research, however, it has been reconceptualised as a dialogical, place-based inquiry that centres local knowledge and spatial memory (Kovach, 2009; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

In this study, the Transect Walk was adapted not as a technical survey but as a walking dialogue through historically significant sites in Edendale, guided by knowledge holders. Its purpose was to co-generate knowledge through movement, presence, and relational engagement with place, recognising land not as a passive backdrop but as an active repository of memory and meaning (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021; wa Thiong'o, 1986). This aligns with Afrocentric epistemology, which affirms that knowledge is situated, relational, and embodied (Asante, 1987; Mazama, 2001). The method fit within the overall design as a spatial entry point into collective memory, creating conditions for the River of Life to extend those narratives temporally. Potential problems included participant fatigue, weather conditions, and the ethical complexities of entering active community spaces. To address these, the research team maintained flexibility in the route and timing, made real-time decisions in consultation with participants, and prioritised care over protocol.

The River of Life (RoL) emerged from narrative therapy and participatory action research traditions (Dumont, 2010; Morgan & Zorn, 2003) as a visual narrative tool that invites participants to represent their life journeys through the metaphor of a river – its sources, bends, rapids, confluences, and calm stretches. In global South and decolonial contexts, RoL has been used to surface collective trauma, resilience, and intergenerational memory without imposing linear or Western temporal frameworks (Karki, 2023; Howard, 2023; Law, 2024). In this study, RoL transformed the spatial insights from the Transect Walk into a temporal narrative of Edendale's history, allowing participants to map continuity, disruption, and resurgence. The method aligns with Afrocentric axiology by foregrounding symbolism, orality, and communal co-creation – values central to AIKS (Ntseane, 2011; Revière, 2002). RoL was integrated into the research design to complement the walk by shifting from place-based recollection to time-based reflection. Potential challenges included variable participation, emotional vulnerability, and the risk of over-interpreting symbolic outputs. These were managed through informed consent, small-group facilitation, and deliberate attention to group dynamics during plenary discussion.

The day began at the Methodist church compound with a communal welcome, where the research team and I reaffirmed the purpose of the engagement: not to extract data, but to co-create a counter-narrative rooted in the land and the lived experiences of Edendale's knowledge holders. The Transect Walk proceeded through three key sites: the Methodist Church compound (including the original church structure), the Methodist Church Graveyard (the resting place of amakholwa with lineages tracing back to the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War), and The Old Ground (a former site of communal gathering). Two originally planned sites were not visited: the former mission school, because children were on break and playing, and the YMCA building, due to participant fatigue and changing weather. These exclusions were not logistical oversights, but intentional, ethically grounded decisions made in consultation with participants. At each stop, knowledge holders paused to share memories, stories, and reflections. Field notes and audio recordings documented verbal contributions as well as non-verbal cues – silence, gesture, tone – recognising these as carriers of meaning. The walk was facilitated collaboratively: I worked alongside team members with deep genealogical and geographic knowledge of Edendale, ensuring that leadership remained distributed and rooted in community expertise.

The walk concluded at the Georgetown Library, where the transition from movement to stillness created a natural pause. After a lunch break, the River of Life session began. Originally planned for 25 participants, ten attended; others chose instead to stay with a grieving family in the community. The group was divided into two: one comprising knowledge holders, the other the research team. Each used large sheets of paper, coloured markers, and symbolic imagery to map Edendale's history as a river. In the plenary, the research team's river highlighted institutional milestones – schools, churches, organisations – while the knowledge holders' river centred spiritual continuity, ancestral presence, quiet resistance, and the intangible forces of memory. The differences were not smoothed over; they were discussed openly. No synthesis was forced. The session ended without consensus, but with mutual recognition of divergent ways of knowing.

Collectively, the Transect Walk and River of Life formed a unified methodology that honoured space as archive and time as memory. They were not applied as external instruments but enacted as collaborative processes, shaped by the community's rhythms, needs, and ethics. The methods generated data but, more importantly, created conditions for knowledge holders to articulate their own historiography. This approach did not claim completeness. It sought depth measured not by coverage but by the integrity of the encounter.

5.7 Trustworthiness in Afrocentric Research

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the credibility, dependability, and authenticity of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lather (1986) expands this to include catalytic validity – the idea that research should provoke transformation, not just description. In Afrocentric scholarship, as Pellerin (2012) argues, trustworthiness is not measured by detachment, but by cultural grounding, relational depth, and community resonance. In this study, trustworthiness emerged not from methodological purity but from co-construction, reflexivity, and reciprocity. The following sections explain how Reviere's (2001) five canons were enacted in practice, drawing directly from my engagement with the research team, knowledge holders, and archival materials.

5.7.1 *Ukweli* (Truth)

Ukweli is the first of the Afrocentric research canons. *Ukweli*-truth in intellectual inquiry means research must be anchored in lived reality and the experience of the community being researched. Truth was not determined by me but confirmed by the community. Member checking was not a final step, but an ongoing practice: I read back excerpts, invited corrections, and adjusted interpretations. For example, when archival records claimed that "the government would not disturb freehold rights", but elders recalled fear and confusion, I did not dismiss their memories as unreliable. Instead, I cross-referenced with the Estates Department memo MSCE #2996/1974, which revealed plans to reclassify land under the Bantu Trust. This triangulation of archives, oral history, and policy documents confirmed that state promises were strategic deceptions. *Ukweli* demands that truth be felt, not just proven.

5.7.2 *Kujitoa* (Self-Positioning)

Kujitoa means self-positioning, the researcher's obligation to name their standpoint. As a Nigerian scholar studying a South African community, I navigated a dual positionality: that of an insider as an African and an outsider as a foreign-born scholar. My African identity fostered empathy and cultural familiarity, but did not grant automatic belonging; Trust had to be earned through humility, consistency, and openness. This reflexivity shaped how I interpreted key moments, such as Eric Matshatsha's reflection in his oral history interview in the Alan Paton archives that "they were used by the missionaries and colonial authorities to civilise the African people". I did not take this as a simple statement of fact, but as a layered truth forged through decades of lived contradiction. *Kujitoa* required me to ask: How does

my distance shape my reading of this? Who benefits from my interpretation? Lather's (1986) call for transparency aligns with *Kujitoa*: truth emerges not from objectivity, but from honest positioning.

5.7.3 *Utulivu* (Harmonious Relationships)

Utulivu (harmonious relationships) were central to building trust. From the first meeting with the EHP team, I prioritised dialogue over extraction, presence over productivity. Harmony was nurtured through active listening, shared meals, and recognition of cultural protocols.

5.7.4 *Ujamaa* (Collective participation)

The canon of *Ujamaa* (collective participation) is understood as the recognition and maintenance of community, which is a core requirement of Afrocentric research. It calls on the researcher to reject rigid researcher–participant separations and the presumption that theory and practice flow solely from the researcher, insisting instead that the lived realities and aspirations of the community shape knowledge production. *Ujamaa* was embodied in every stage of the research. The research team were not assistants but co-designers: they helped revise instruments, identified knowledge holders, transcribed interviews, and led coding sessions. Their insights significantly shaped the structure of the study. When two Rivers of Life were drawn, one by knowledge holders, one by the research team, and me, their differences were not erased but celebrated. This moment of divergence became a space of decolonial dialogue, where power was shared, not hoarded. As Lather (1993) argues, justice in research means including those who have been excluded. *Ujamaa* ensured that Edendale residents were not subjects, but authors of their own history.

5.7.5 *Uhaki* (Harmony and Fairness)

Uhaki (harmony and fairness) guided the entire process. *Uhaki* refers to an Afrocentric ethical principle that requires research to be conducted with fairness, care, and accountability to all participants, particularly those being researched. It emphasises the maintenance of harmonious relationships and the protection of collective wellbeing, serving as a key criterion for the ethical validity of Afrocentric research. In keeping with this principle, Knowledge holders received no monetary compensation; instead, they benefited through gaining access to transcripts, summaries, and archival materials that had been locked away for a long time, ensuring reciprocity and shared ownership of knowledge. Fairness also meant acknowledging contradictions: the *amakholwa* were both agents and instruments, collaborators and resisters.

I refused to simplify their complexity into a hero or a traitor. As Chapter Six shows, figures like Simeon Kambule fought bravely at Isandlwana, yet colonisers narrated their heroism. *Uhaki* required that I tell this story fully, not to shame, but to heal.

5.7.6 Establishing Trustworthiness

Beyond the Afrocentric canons, I employed triangulation (Denzin, 1978) across four sources: archival records, oral histories, Transect Walk reflections, and River of Life maps. I also used member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): sharing drafts with knowledge holders for feedback. One elder said, "You wrote it well". Together, these practices ensured that the research was not only credible but also transformative, aligning with Lather's vision of catalytic validity and Reviere's (2001) call for epistemic justice.

5.8 Data analysis

To ensure analytical clarity, it is necessary to explicitly distinguish between methodology, methods, and methods of analysis within this study. The methodology refers to the Afrocentric research paradigm and the philosophical assumptions underpinning the inquiry. The methods comprise the specific data-generation techniques employed: archival research, oral history interviews, the Transect Walk, and the River of Life workshop. The methods of analysis refer to the procedures used to interpret the generated data. In this study, data were analysed through inductive (emic) thematic analysis, followed by deductive (etic) analysis using the Learning–Unlearning–Relearning (LUR) analytical model and Rule and John's (2011) four-dimensional spatial metaphors.

Data analysis varies depending on the research paradigm and design used. However, at its core, it is the process of examining raw data to derive meaning from disorganised information and organise it into a clear, conclusive format that supports informed decision-making by revealing patterns, relationships, and insights relevant to the research questions. In qualitative research, as Marshall and Rossman (2014) note, data analysis involves condensing, organising, structuring, and giving meaning to potentially large amounts of data. It is through this process that researchers make sense of the data, interpret its significance, and develop theories that reveal patterns and insights (Schwandt et al., 2007).

In quantitative research, data analysis focuses on organising data, applying descriptive and inferential statistics, and using techniques like regression analysis or ANOVA to test

hypotheses and draw conclusions about the broader population (Creswell, 2018). Conversely, qualitative data analysis is an ongoing, iterative process of coding, categorising, identifying themes, and interpreting meaning. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) emphasise that this process is reflexive, often requiring researchers to cycle between data generation and analysis to refine their understanding. Generally, qualitative data analysis uses an emic (inductive) or etic (deductive) approach, or a combination of the two.

5.8.1 Inductive analysis – Emic perspective

Inductive analysis is a method in qualitative research that enables patterns, themes, or even a theory to emerge from the data rather than being imposed prior to data collection (Armat et al., 2018). It involves a process of systematic abstraction, wherein raw data are reduced, coded, and grouped into categories and themes that reflect patterns of shared meaning (Kyngäs et al., 2019). This approach is particularly aligned with interpretive paradigms that prioritise participants' lived realities, as it relies on reasoning grounded in observation and experiential evidence (Hayes & Heit, 2018). Within the framework of reflexive thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019), inductive analysis requires the researcher to immerse deeply in the dataset during Phase One, engaging in repeated, attentive readings to become intimately familiar with its nuances (Henning & Smit, 2004). This immersion sets the stage for Phase Two – initial coding – where the researcher generates both descriptive and interpretive codes that remain close to participants' own language while also probing underlying meanings and significance (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

As emphasised by Henning and Smit (2004), this is not a passive process; themes do not simply "emerge" from the data, but are actively constructed through the researcher's reflexive, iterative engagement. Coding functions not as mere labelling but as a meaning-making practice – what Whitney et al. (2024) describe as "decoding" the complex ways individuals and communities interpret their social worlds. Braun and Clarke (2019) further caution against conflating codes with themes; rather, themes are developed in later phases by systematically grouping and refining codes into coherent, interpretive patterns that answer the research questions. This process explicitly rejects topic-based or superficial coding in favour of analytical depth, requiring the researcher to move beyond "what is said" to interrogate "what it means" (Henning & Smit, 2004, p. 28).

By resisting predetermined categories and remaining open to complexity, contradiction, and silence within the data, inductive thematic analysis ensures findings are empirically grounded

and richly contextualised in participants' lived experiences. This epistemological openness aligns with decolonial and Afrocentric research imperatives, where centring community voices, relational knowledge, and Indigenous ways of knowing constitutes both an ethical stance and a methodological commitment (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Henning & Smit, 2004).

In this study, inductive analysis was conducted within an Afrocentric framework, with the research team actively participating in reading and reflecting on the transcripts and discussing their insights in relation to the research objectives. Participants' contributions informed the analysis's interpretive direction, ensuring the process remained grounded in their lived experiences and Indigenous epistemologies. The process began with transcription. As Kawamoto et al. (2023) note, transcription breaks down data into manageable units, such as words, phrases, and key concepts, enabling deeper engagement with the material and ensuring that emerging themes are rooted in the cultural and historical context of the knowledge holders.

All oral interviews were transcribed verbatim by bilingual members of the EHP research team, who are fluent in isiZulu and English. Transcription was an interpretive act. Each transcript was reviewed and refined by the knowledge holders themselves (through member checking), who corrected inaccuracies in language, tone, and cultural nuance to ensure fidelity to their intended meanings. This step was essential in preventing misinterpretations that could distort the epistemic integrity of their narratives. Some knowledge holders initially viewed this process as time-consuming and preferred to move directly to the next stage of engagement; a few declined to participate in the review altogether. We respected their decisions while continuing to invite dialogue through follow-up visits. Where possible, key excerpts were read aloud during subsequent meetings, allowing verbal feedback and corrections to be incorporated into the final transcripts, ensuring inclusivity without compromising rigour. Translation occurred simultaneously with transcription, as team members collaborated to render expressions, spiritual references, and historical terms into English while preserving their cultural significance.

These collaborative transcript review and meaning-making sessions were not led solely by the researcher but facilitated collectively, creating space for dialogue and shared sense-making. Within these sessions, the naming of recurring themes was guided by collaborative inquiry rather than external categorisation. Dialogical questions such as "What does this mean to you?", "Why did you say it this way?" or "Is this how others would remember it?" were asked. Such questions invited contextual insights into the meanings behind the data,

allowing interpretations to be refined, biases to be challenged, and the integrity of Indigenous knowledge systems to be affirmed.

Furthermore, at every stage of engagement with knowledge holders, including during follow-up visits and interview cycles, emerging themes were discussed and validated in real time. This ongoing dialogue served as a form of continuous member checking, allowing participants to confirm, correct, or expand upon their initial interpretations. By validating the findings, knowledge holders reclaimed authority over how their histories were documented and understood. This approach directly challenges the traditional model of knowledge extraction. As Reviere (2001) asserts, community members are the ultimate authority in determining truth, and this study adhered to that principle by ensuring that knowledge was not simply gathered but co-constructed.

5.8.2 Deductive analysis – Etic perspective

From an etic perspective, the study's deductive analysis examined how the Afrocentric learning-unlearning-relearning triad, as outlined in Chapter Four, manifested in the generated data. Afrocentric theory was used to identify patterned expressions of epistemic learning shaped by colonial encounters, processes of epistemic disruption, and moments of reclamation and regeneration within the Edendale community. In this sense, deductive analysis functioned to trace the presence, limits, and tensions of the triad (i.e. learning-unlearning-relearning) across the narratives and practices shared by knowledge holders. Consistent with Reviere's (2001) Afrocentric canons of validity, particularly *ukweli* (community-grounded truth) and *kujitoa* (ethical commitment), deductive analysis did not treat knowledge holders as sites for theoretical confirmation. Instead, Afrocentric theory operated as a sensitising framework through which learning, unlearning, and relearning could be identified, examined, and, where necessary, challenged. Member checking (Morris, 1999) played a critical role in this process by enabling knowledge holders to engage with how the triad was being interpreted in relation to their lived experiences, ensuring that theoretical abstraction remained accountable to community meaning.

Analytically, learning manifested in narratives that reflected the internalisation of missionary and colonial knowledge systems, particularly through formal schooling, Christianity, and administrative governance. These forms of learning were evident where knowledge holders described early understandings of progress, morality, and legitimacy as aligned with Western epistemic norms. Deductively, these accounts were interpreted as expressions of learning as

an epistemic condition, rather than as failure or loss, consistent with the theoretical position that learning marks the starting point of epistemic disruption within Afrocentric analysis.

In contrast to the internalisation of colonial frameworks**,** unlearning emerged where these inherited frameworks were questioned, unsettled, or rendered insufficient. This was evident in moments where knowledge holders critically reflected on the limits of missionary education, challenged colonial narratives of Edendale's origins, or contested binaries that positioned Indigenous knowledge as inferior or obsolete. From a deductive standpoint, such moments were interpreted as instances of epistemic rupture in which internalised colonial logics were confronted rather than reproduced. Unlearning was thus identified not as rejection of Western knowledge per se, but as critical interrogation of its authority and totalising claims.

Building on this critical rupture, relearning manifested where knowledge holders articulated renewed engagement with AIKS, communal values, and ancestral epistemologies, often in hybrid or adaptive forms. These included the re-articulation of *Ubuntu* as a guiding ethical framework, the reclamation of oral history as authoritative knowledge, and the reinterpretation of Christianity through African moral and relational logics. Deductively, these practices were analysed as expressions of epistemic regeneration, in which African knowledge was not merely recovered but reworked for contemporary relevance.

In conducting my deductive analysis, I also drew on Rule and John's (2011) four-dimensional framework (background, foreground, liftground, and underground), which allowed me to situate epistemic processes across layered contexts. In Rule and John's framework (which they use to understand cases within case study research), the *background* comprises sociohistorical processes, events, and developments that shape both the present and the future – in this case, for example, precolonial governance and the founding of the Edendale mission. The *foreground* is the present reality, which obviously shifts over time. So the foreground might include the lived reality of the missionary settlement after 1851, such as land titling and mission schooling, but might later include wage labour or the lived experience of apartheid. The *liftground* denotes the dominant discursive space, created by institutions such as politicians and the media, to make sense of the present reality and thus shape public understanding of it. In this case, the liftground is the Western epistemic order that erased Indigenous presence through missionary historiography, archival silences, and practices of renaming. The *underground* captures submerged discourses – what is generally written out of the liftground through a process of selection, omission and emphasis. In this case, the

Indigenous ontologies that persisted without recognition include domestic rituals, naming practices, and ancestral burials. These last two dimensions operate simultaneously; so colonial dominance coexists alongside enduring Indigenous epistemic continuity.

Through this layered deductive analysis, the Afrocentric learning-unlearning-relearning triad was not treated as a linear sequence, but as a recursive and co-existing set of epistemic processes. The analysis demonstrates how Afrocentric theory functions as an explanatory framework that makes visible the complex ways in which knowledge holders navigate epistemic disruption, critique inherited logics, and regenerate African ways of knowing within a historically hybrid space such as Edendale. Deductive analysis thus served to illuminate how Afrocentric learning theory is lived, negotiated, and enacted within community knowledge practices, rather than merely asserted at the level of abstraction.

5.9 Research Ethics

Research ethics are not merely procedural obligations but moral commitments that shape every dimension of inquiry. As Resnik (2011) and Wiles (2013) affirm, ethical research protects participants' dignity, ensures transparency, and upholds accountability, especially when engaging historically marginalised communities. In this study, ethics were not treated as a checklist, but as an intrinsic component of the Afrocentric paradigm: a framework that values communal responsibility, cultural respect, and relational accountability over extractive neutrality. While I adhered to institutional standards of autonomy, confidentiality, informed consent, beneficence, and non-maleficence, I interpreted these principles through an African epistemic lens that prioritises interdependence, *Ubuntu*, and collective well-being over Western individualism. My ethical stance was shaped by the reality that I was not entering Edendale as a neutral observer, but as a researcher embedded in a long-term collaborative project, the EHP, with deep community ties and shared historical goals. Ethical clearance was initially granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Research Ethics Committee.

However, as the methodology evolved through sustained collaboration with the research team and ongoing engagement with community processes, I submitted three successive applications for ethical amendment. These amendments sought approval for changes to (i) the methods of data generation**,** (ii) the research instruments, and (iii) data management procedures**.** Amendments to data generation and research instruments were required to accommodate the inclusion of additional participatory methods and to adapt instruments to be

more dialogical and culturally responsive. In addition, a data management amendment was submitted to allow members of the research team to access interview transcripts and other generated texts for purposes of collective reflection, shared interpretation, and deeper contextual understanding of the data.

This shift recognised knowledge generation as a relational and collective process rather than an individual analytic task. These changes emerged as the study moved from a pre-defined methodological design towards a participatory approach grounded in collaboration, trust, and responsiveness to community knowledge practices. Each amendment, therefore, reflected not merely procedural compliance with institutional ethics requirements, but an ethical commitment to relational accountability, ensuring that evolving research practices remained answerable to the community and the research collective, and not only to institutional protocols.

5.9.1 Autonomy and confidentiality

Autonomy in Western research often centres on individual choice. But as Mkabela (2005, 2024) and Engelbrecht (2014) argue, African ethics are rooted in communal deliberation. During this study, decisions about participation were rarely made in isolation; instead, they were discussed and agreed upon. Thus, I approached autonomy not as individual consent alone, but as a multi-layered process involving both personal agency and communal validation. To protect confidentiality, I replaced real names with pseudonyms and removed identifying details from transcripts and reports. This was not only an institutional requirement but a culturally necessary act of discretion. As Appiah (2020) notes, respect in African contexts includes knowing what not to disclose. For example, during discussions about ancestral burial sites or spiritual practices, I exercised heightened caution in documentation, ensuring that sacred knowledge was neither exposed nor misrepresented.

5.9.2 Informed consent

Informed consent was not a one-time signature, but an ongoing dialogue. Before approaching individuals, I first sought permission from community gatekeepers. Specifically, the community councillor was to ensure the study resonated with local values and priorities. Only after this communal approval did I proceed to individual engagements. Consent forms were presented in accessible language, with oral explanations provided in isiZulu where needed. I clearly explained the purpose of the research, the use of audio recordings, and the right to

withdraw at any time without consequences, a principle reinforced throughout the data-generation process. Manti (2018) reminds us that true consent requires understanding, not just agreement. Therefore, I returned to participants during follow-up visits to reconfirm their comfort with the process. This dialogical, multi-step approach, inspired by Marovah and Mutanga (2024), honours the *Ubuntu* ethic and rejects the notion of the researcher as the sole authority. Instead, I positioned myself as a guest in a shared knowledge journey.

5.9.3 Beneficence and non-maleficence

Beneficence in this study meant more than avoiding harm it meant actively contributing to the restoration of epistemic dignity. The goal was not only to document Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) but to validate them as legitimate, dynamic, and essential to Edendale's identity. By centring African voices, challenging colonial distortions, and amplifying silenced histories, the research aimed to empower the community rather than exploit its vulnerability. Non-maleficence requires vigilance against misrepresentation, emotional distress, and the reinforcement of colonial stereotypes. As Ewuoso et al. (2022) warn, even well-intentioned research can perpetuate epistemic violence if it fails to listen deeply or uphold relational accountability. To mitigate this risk, I conducted structured debriefing sessions with the research team after each round of interviews, allowing us to reflect critically on tone, power dynamics, emotional impact, and interpretive assumptions. These discussions were not merely logistical but ethical, ensuring that our presence in the community remained grounded in humility, respect, and responsiveness.

For example, one such ethical correction emerged after the first stage of interviews, when it became clear that full collaboration required the entire research team to have access to transcripts. Initially, consent had been obtained only for the use by my supervisors and me. Recognising that collective analysis was essential to an Afrocentric process, we revised the consent protocol and returned to each knowledge holder to obtain renewed consent. This adjustment deepened trust because participants knew exactly who was listening, and why. In this way, ethical practice was not static, but iterative: shaped not by compliance alone, but by ongoing dialogue, reflexivity, and respect for the sovereignty of those whose stories formed the heart of the research. Reviere's (2001) five canons of Afrocentric validity, *Kujitoa*, *Utulivu*, *Ujamaa*, *Ukweli*, *Uhaki*, were not abstract ideals, but ethical anchors that guided every decision. They ensured that ethics and validity were inseparable: a finding could not be credible if it was not also just, respectful, and communally affirmed.

5.10 Limitations of the study

All research is shaped by contextual, methodological, and epistemological constraints, and this study is no exception. As Price and Murnan (2004) note, limitations are not failures but inherent features of research design that influence how findings are interpreted and applied. Rather than conceal them, I name these limitations transparently, not to diminish the study's value, but to situate it honestly within its scope and purpose.

5.10.1 Linguistic and cultural positionality

One significant limitation stems from my positionality as a Nigerian researcher engaging with a South African community whose primary language is isiZulu. While I am fluent in English and familiar with broader African epistemologies, I am not a native speaker of isiZulu nor fully immersed in the local cultural nuances of Edendale. I am thus in many respects an 'outsider' in terms of my researcher positionality. This created a potential gap in accessing the full depth of expression, idiomatic meaning, and spiritual resonance embedded in participants' narratives. To mitigate this, I relied on the bilingual research team, composed of community members fluent in both isiZulu and English, to support transcription, translation, and interpretation. During interviews, when knowledge holders expressed themselves in isiZulu, team members provided real-time clarification, ensuring that metaphors, proverbs, and culturally specific references were accurately rendered. The transcripts were then reviewed collectively with the team to preserve the semantic and emotional integrity. Despite these measures, some subtleties may have been lost or flattened in translation. However, rather than seeing this as a deficit, I frame it as an opportunity for epistemic humility, a recognition that full understanding is co-created and always partial.

5.10.2 Case study specificity and generalisability

As a single exploratory case study, this research does not aim for statistical generalisability, a well-known limitation of the design (Yin, 2018). Edendale's history as a mission-founded settlement of *amakholwa*, shaped by colonial wars, Christian conversion, and conditional land rights, is unique in its configuration. Therefore, the findings cannot be extrapolated to all AIKS or other similar communities in KwaZulu-Natal. However, the study seeks theoretical transferability rather than generalisation. Its contribution lies in deep contextual insight – the kind of rich, nuanced understanding that enables readers to assess whether and how findings resonate in other settings. For example, the dynamics of being both agent and instrument

under colonial rule, as seen in the participation of Edendale men in the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War, may be reflected in other frontier communities where African Christians mediated between the empire and tradition. By applying an Afrocentric framework centring African subjectivity, unlearning colonial distortions, and relearning Indigenous ways of knowing, the study offers a replicable epistemological approach, even if the empirical context remains specific.

5.10.3 Data richness and interpretive complexity

Qualitative research, particularly studies employing multiple methods such as document analysis, oral history, Transect Walks, and the River of Life, generates what Stake (1995) describes as data richness rather than data overload. This richness was navigated through continuous alignment with the study's core objectives: understanding how Western knowledge systems have shaped AIKS in Edendale and how knowledge holders have responded with resilience, adaptation, and reclamation.

To maintain analytical focus and coherence, I employed iterative coding, member checking, and regular debriefing sessions with the research team following each stage of data generation. These processes supported the refinement of themes and ensured that interpretations remained grounded in the lived experiences and epistemic realities of knowledge holders, rather than drifting into abstract or decontextualised theorising.

5.10.4 Emotional and communal sensitivity

The research was conducted within a living community where historical trauma, land loss, forced removals, and familial displacement remain emotionally present. On the day of the Transect Walk and River of Life workshop, news of a sudden death in Georgetown prompted many invited knowledge holders to withdraw to mourn with the family. While this affected participation numbers, it reinforced a critical truth: research must yield to communal rhythms and *Ubuntu* ethics. We proceeded only with those who chose to attend, respecting grief as a central part of the community's moral fabric. This sensitivity limited the number of voices formally engaged in that session, but it also deepened the process's ethical integrity. It reminded me that research in postcolonial contexts is not just about gathering data, but about honouring relationships, memory, and dignity.

In sum, while this study has limitations, they do not invalidate its findings. Instead, they clarify its boundaries and reinforce its commitment to relational accountability, cultural authenticity, and epistemic justice, core tenets of Afrocentric research. As Simon (2011)

reminds us, acknowledging limitations is not a weakness, but a mark of scholarly responsibility. In naming them here, I affirm that this research does not claim to tell the whole story, but it strives to tell a truer one.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter underscores Afrocentricity as the guiding paradigm in this study, emphasising its importance in centring African perspectives, traditions, and epistemologies. The rationale for selecting this approach was explained, with a detailed exploration of the research design, sampling criteria, data-generation instruments, procedures, and how these were affected by adopting the Afrocentric paradigm. Additionally, the chapter provided insight into the data analysis methods and highlighted the ethical considerations throughout the research process. Afrocentricity was thus operationalised as a constitutive methodological principle that deliberately responds to the layered epistemic displacements identified earlier in the thesis.

Through oral history, the Transect Walk, the River of Life method, and document analysis, the study sought to recover intergenerational knowledge transmission disrupted by missionary intervention, re-embed epistemic meaning in landscapes reconfigured by colonial spatial logics, and reconstruct temporal continuities fragmented by demographic and political upheavals. In this way, the methodology enacted epistemic justice in practice by creating conditions for relational accountability, communal co-creation, and the regeneration of AIKS. The chapter has further outlined the ethical considerations guiding this process, ensuring respect, reciprocity, and accountability to the community. The data generated through archival research and document analysis, presented in the next chapter, form the empirical foundation for this decolonial methodological orientation and enable a grounded engagement with Edendale's historical record. In the next chapter, I present the data generated through the archival research and document analysis.

Archival Data Presentations and Discussion

6.1 Orientation and Archival Scope

The previous chapter outlined the methodological framework of this study, foregrounding Afrocentricity as the guiding paradigm. It explained the rationale for this approach and detailed the research design, sampling criteria, data-generation methods, ethical considerations, and analytical procedures. Building on that foundation, this chapter presents the archival data generated during fieldwork. It discusses it in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapters Two and Three and to the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Four. This chapter does more than chronicle the historical events of Edendale. It interprets archival materials as both empirical evidence and epistemological terrain, using them to theorise learning as a decolonial process. Central to this interpretation is the argument that Edendale's history demonstrates epistemic continuity: the persistence of AIKS despite layered displacements.

This chapter navigates a critical analytical distinction often obscured in Edendale historiography: the separation between (1) the *amakholwa* settlers, descendants of Allison's followers who arrived in 1851 already shaped by prior missionary enculturation and (2) Indigenous inhabitants whose families occupied the Msunduzi valley before colonial settlement and who maintained AIKS continuity outside mission control. While both groups exercised agency, their epistemic positions differed fundamentally. The *amakholwa* negotiated within already-ruptured frameworks; Indigenous inhabitants preserved knowledge transmission through parallel lineages. Msimang's manuscripts, which I draw on extensively in this chapter, are invaluable as an African-authored counter-archive and represent the former trajectory of the voice notably absent from my oral history data, precisely because no direct descendants of Allison's settlers participated in this study.

This distinction underscores the analytical approach adopted in this chapter. Continuity does not primarily reside in the lineage of Allison's original *amakholwa* settlers, whose missionary enculturation enabled literacy, Christianity, and land acquisition while simultaneously disrupting Indigenous epistemic transmission (as discussed in Chapter Three). Rather, continuity endures through the descendants of precolonial inhabitants and other communities

who occupied the Msunduzi valley before Andries Pretorius's land acquisition. By recentering African epistemic agency, the chapter examines how these communities engaged colonial knowledge systems through ongoing processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning. In this sense, the archive is approached not as a neutral repository of facts, but as a contested site where power, knowledge, and meaning were produced, negotiated, and resisted.

Unlike Chapter Seven, which presents dialogical co-production and separates data presentation from thematic analysis, engagement with colonial-era archives in this chapter necessitates an integrated analytical approach. Archival documents are ideologically mediated artefacts shaped by missionary paternalism, colonial administration, and settler liberal frameworks. To present them without immediate contextualisation and critique would risk reinscribing their epistemic assumptions. Each source is therefore read against the grain, interrogated for its silences and contradictions, and reinterpreted through an Afrocentric lens that centres African agency, relationality, and historical continuity. My intention in this discussion is to show that the historical development of Edendale was shaped not by passive assimilation into colonial modernity, but by sustained and strategic processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning. Literacy, Christianity, and freehold land ownership are analysed not as endpoints of civilisation or indicators of colonial success, but as tactical resources selectively appropriated to secure communal autonomy, moral authority, and territorial continuity within a racialised political order. Across successive historical moments, African initiatives towards self-determination repeatedly provoked institutional regulation and containment. This recurring pattern of epistemic struggle provides the central analytical logic that organises the chapter.

The chapter is organised chronologically, not as a narrative device, but as an analytical scaffold that allows these learning processes to be traced across changing political and institutional contexts. It begins with precolonial Natal and early African encounters prior to 1850, establishing Indigenous systems of knowledge, governance, and land use as the epistemic foundation for later engagements. It then examines the missionary encounter and the Mahamba exodus of the 1830s to 1850s, followed by the founding of Edendale in 1851 as an African-led experiment in education, Christianity, and land tenure. The discussion proceeds to the period of wartime autonomy and the Anglo-Zulu War of the 1870s, before analysing the era of colonial backlash and the contradictions of freehold ownership from the 1880s to 1910. The final sections consider the impact of Union, the 1913 Land Act, and

organised civic resistance between 1910 and 1948, concluding with apartheid-era containment and the sustained struggle for freehold rights from 1948 to 1994. This structure makes visible continuities and shifts in how knowledge was learned, contested, and reclaimed over time.

The archival repositories consulted include the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg; the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository of the KwaZulu-Natal Archives and Records Service; the Msunduzi Museum Library; and the Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA) online archive hosted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The Alan Paton Centre houses the Aitchison Collection, comprising missionary records, apartheid-era administrative materials, post-apartheid oral history projects relating to Edendale, and newspaper collections such as *The Natal Witness* and *The Mercury*. While invaluable, these sources are shaped by editorial biases rooted in white liberal and colonial frameworks and therefore require critical reinterpretation.

The Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, formerly the Natal Archives Depot, preserves official government correspondence, administrative reports, Native Affairs documentation, and land records, all deeply infused with the bureaucratic logics of surveillance, control, and paternalism. The Msunduzi Museum Library contains visual archival materials produced by missionaries, anthropologists, and colonial administrators, many of which reproduce an ethnographic gaze that objectifies and simplifies African life. By contrast, the DISA archive provides access to digitised African-language newspapers such as *Ilanga laseNatal*, as well as liberation publications that offer partial counter-narratives to dominant colonial historiography.

Although rich in material, these archival collections are structured, preserved, and classified according to colonial epistemologies. At the same time, they contain fissures where African voices surface, resist, or redirect official narratives. An Afrocentric reading attends to both presence and absence by examining what is articulated and what is silenced, including the marginalisation of women's economic contributions, non-Christian epistemologies, and tenant experiences. As Asante (2017) contends, restoring Africans as subjects rather than objects of history requires sustained attention to both what is recorded and what is omitted. The archival engagement undertaken here thus serves not only as historical grounding for subsequent dialogical methods, but as an ethical commitment to epistemic justice.

Ultimately, this chapter enacts a form of relearning. It treats the archive not as a fixed repository of truth, but as a contested terrain where power, memory, and meaning intersect. Through careful reinterpretation, the chapter seeks to recover Edendale not as an anomaly of colonial benevolence but as evidence of African intellectual, cultural, and territorial sovereignty. In doing so, it affirms the central argument of this study: that African communities were, and remain, active agents of knowledge production, whose histories reveal enduring practices of self-determined learning under conditions of domination.

6.2 Epistemic Continuity and Contestation in Precolonial Natal and Early Missionary Encounters (Pre-1850-1851)

This section demonstrates that a well-established African society existed in the Edendale corridor prior to colonial settlement, characterised by its own political organisation, spiritual cosmologies, land ethics, and systems of knowledge transmission. Archival evidence indicates that these Indigenous epistemic frameworks were not erased by missionary or colonial intrusion. Instead, they shaped how African communities interpreted Christianity, navigated displacement, and pursued autonomy throughout the nineteenth century. Precolonial Natal is therefore approached not as a static or vanished past, but as a living epistemic foundation through which later encounters were learned, contested, and reworked.

As established in Chapter Three, the question of pre-1851 occupation remains historiographically contested. Colonial narratives deployed 'empty land' claims to justify dispossession, while revisionist historians (Cobbing 1988; Hamilton, 1998) demonstrate how such claims served colonial interests. Guy (2009) cautions that, specifically in Natal, colonisers did not claim absolute emptiness but argued that the land had been 'depopulated' through regional conflict, a narrative that nonetheless facilitated appropriation. This study approaches the issue through an Afrocentric lens: even if displacement occurred through Mfecane-era warfare (itself partly catalysed by colonial pressures), or Voortrekker incursion, this does not validate *terra nullius* logic nor erase Indigenous sovereignty. Crucially, archival silences regarding pre-colonial occupation reflect epistemic erasure rather than actual absence they are part of the process of creating a liftground that hides or silences the underground, as I discussed in Chapter 5 (5.8.2). *Welverdiend* must therefore be understood as land whose Indigenous epistemic and territorial relationships had been disrupted through layered

violence, regional conflict, colonial reclassification of land as alienable property, and Pretorius's military occupation, not as inherently 'empty' terrain awaiting Christian cultivation." As I have argued above, crucially, the AIKS that persist in Edendale derive not from the *amakholwa* settlers, who arrived enculturated into Western Christian frameworks, but from descendants of the original inhabitants whose presence predates both Pretorius and Allison, demonstrating the endurance of Indigenous knowledge despite layered dispossession

For the period prior to 1843, the archival record remains mediated and fragmentary. No contemporaneous written accounts by African political actors from the Edendale corridor survive prior to British annexation. The dominant archive, composed of missionary journals, settler correspondence, and early colonial reports, frequently represents African societies through narratives of chaos, decline, or absence, thereby reinforcing the colonial fiction of *terra nullius*. Within this constrained evidentiary terrain, the unpublished manuscripts of H. Selby Msimang (1886–1982) constitute a rare African-authored counter-archive. Born in Edendale as a descendant of Allison's *amakholwa* settlers rather than of the area's pre-colonial inhabitants, Msimang was an intellectual, educator, and community leader who produced his manuscripts between the 1930s and 1970s. Drawing on oral histories, family memory, and conversations with elders, he described his method as listening to and recording their accounts (Msimang, n.d.-c, p. 1), thereby undertaking a deliberate act of epistemic recovery in a context where African voices were largely excluded from official records. His writings, therefore, represent a specifically positioned perspective: that of *amakholwa* descendants asserting historical agency and land claims within frameworks already shaped by missionary enculturation.

While this voice helps address the absence of direct *amakholwa* descendants in the present oral history data, it should not be conflated with the continuity of pre-mission Indigenous knowledge systems, as Msimang documents processes of negotiation within epistemic disruption rather than unbroken AIKS transmission. As I have already argued, the *amakholwa*'s epistemic negotiations occurred within already-ruptured frameworks, since missionary enculturation had severed direct intergenerational transmission of precolonial epistemologies prior to settlement in Edendale, as discussed in Chapter Three. By contrast, AIKS continuity resided primarily with non-Christian descendants of the area's original inhabitants, whose practices, such as *umemulo* (coming-of-age rites) and *umsamo* (ancestral shrine observance), persisted outside mission control.

This distinction is critical to avoid the trap of measuring African legitimacy through proximity to Western norms (Dei, 2012; Ntseane, 2011). Msimang's narrative, while asserting African agency and land claims against colonial erasure, operates within an already-transformed epistemic framework, one shaped by mission education and Christian cosmology. His counter-archive powerfully contests colonial historiography yet simultaneously bears the imprint of missionary epistemologies, as seen in his adoption of Shaka-as-sole-cause Mfecane narratives. This does not invalidate his account but positions it as a hybrid text: African-authored yet shaped by colonial explanatory paradigms circulating within mission-educated intellectual circles.

Although Msimang's accounts are necessarily retrospective and lack corroboration from contemporaneous African-authored documents, aspects of his work are supported by other sources. Oscroft's (1954, October) article in *Ikhwezi*, for example, observes that in precolonial Zulu society "the boy answered to the community as well, since any man was expected to reprove any child", pointing to systems of collective moral accountability. Read alongside Msimang's work, such fragments reinforce the argument advanced in Chapter Two that colonial conquest targeted not only land and political authority but also the epistemic foundations of African belonging, morality, and social regulation. Even within the limitations of the archive, the evidence reveals a social world structured by relational land ethics, ancestral accountability, and communal oversight. These foundations would later inform Edendale's pursuit of autonomy.

In *Historical Events Prior: Edendale* (Msimang, n.d.-c), Msimang reconstructs the early nineteenth-century social landscape of Natal as one shaped by movement, adaptation, and political reconfiguration. He identifies the period between approximately 1810 and 1840 as one of "devastations", a term he uses to capture the cascading upheavals produced by warfare, forced migration, and the collapse of earlier political formations. The initial wave of disruption is attributed to the rise of the Zulu kingdom under Shaka, whose military expansion is presented as generating widespread displacement across the region. This framing reflects an interpretation of the Mfecane that closely aligns with early colonial and missionary historiography, an approach later critiqued by scholars such as Cobbing (1988) and Hamilton (1998) for advancing a Shaka-as-sole-cause narrative. As outlined in Chapter Three, this interpretive frame functioned ideologically by representing precolonial African societies as inherently violent and unstable, thereby legitimising European intervention as a civilising necessity. Msimang's articulation of *amaNgwane* flight as beginning "with rapine

and bloodshed" through Hlubi territory suggests that his historical consciousness, while grounded in community memory, was also shaped by the epistemic frameworks circulating within mission-educated African intellectual circles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This does not invalidate his account; rather, it points to ways in which African counter-archives could simultaneously contest colonial erasure and reproduce aspects of colonial historiography. His narrative thus emerges as a hybrid historical text asserting African presence, agency, and land claims, while also bearing the imprint of colonial explanatory paradigms that structured understandings of violence, causality, and social change.

According to Msimang, these processes produced "considerable dislocations and tribal dispersals", compelling communities to form new alliances, absorb displaced groups, or migrate into unfamiliar territories. Msimang records that the *amaNgwane* were among the first communities affected by these disruptions around 1812. In their northward movement, they passed through the territory of the *amaHlubi* under Chief Mthimkhulu, sparking violent conflict that fractured the *amaHlubi* polity. According to Msimang (n.d.-c), Mthimkhulu's brother, Mpangazitha, subsequently led a breakaway faction that included lineages later central to the founding of Edendale, namely the Kambule, Shabalala, Xaba, Msimang, Mthembu, Twala, and Caluza families. This detail is analytically significant because it situates Edendale's 1851 landowners within precolonial political genealogies rather than portraying the settlement as a missionary creation detached from local African historical processes.

Msimang (n.d.-a) also documents the spiritual epistemologies that structured social and moral life during this period. He notes that Swazi belief systems were centred on *Umvelinqange* as the supreme creative force, with ancestors (*amadlozi*) serving as mediators between the living and the divine. Ritual practices responded to collective crises such as illness or drought, reinforcing communal responsibility, ancestral accountability, and relational ethics. Read in relation to Chapter Two, these practices exemplify Indigenous African epistemologies grounded in spirituality, relationality, and collective well-being, epistemologies that colonial and missionary knowledge systems would later seek to delegitimise or recast as superstition (Chilisa, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Wiredu, 1997). As argued in Chapter Two, such systems constituted coherent ways of knowing and being rather than fragmented belief structures, providing the moral and ontological foundations through which African communities interpreted subsequent Christian teachings and colonial disruptions (Asante,

1998; Mudimbe, 1988). These ontological frameworks did not disappear with the introduction of Christianity. In *History of Indaleni I* (Msimang, n.d.-b), Msimang explains that African Christians interpreted Christian concepts through existing moral categories. Christ could be understood as analogous to the *idlozi* as an intercessor, while the Christian conception of God resonated with existing understandings of *Umvelinqange*. This process was not syncretism born of confusion but epistemic negotiation, an effort to locate Christian revelation within an already coherent African moral universe.

As established in Chapter Two, missionary Christianity often functioned as a vehicle of epistemicide, seeking to displace Indigenous cosmologies through institutional discipline and linguistic transformation (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Sundkler, 1961). Msimang's account complicates this narrative by foregrounding African interpretive agency. Rather than passively receiving doctrine, African converts selectively translated Christian teachings through Indigenous epistemic frameworks. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, conversion in Natal frequently operated as cultural translation rather than epistemic rupture (Etherington, 1971; Guy, 2009). The missionary's arrival was interpreted through the lens of prophecy rather than passively accepted. Msimang (n.d.-a) records a Swazi vision foretelling that "a nation would come out of the Sea with long straight hairs bringing two things, viz: a bound-up book (Bible) and a button", symbolising the intertwined arrival of spiritual knowledge and material power. This framing reflects discernment and ambivalence rather than unquestioning submission.

Drawing on oral histories, Msimang reconstructs how King Mswati II interpreted the converts' abandonment of traditional dress and customs as a challenge to royal authority. With the support of Boer commandos, Swazi royal forces destroyed Mahamba in late 1846. Msimang records that "nothing but ruin remained", capturing the devastation faced by the displaced community (Msimang, n.d.-c, p. 2). The Mahamba exodus that followed was therefore not a voluntary spiritual migration. However, a forced displacement rooted in political contestation, a rupture that would shape Edendale's founding ethos of territorial self-determination. On 17 September 1846, Reverend James Allison and approximately 200 converts departed Swaziland, crossing the Pongolo River on 6 October. They were received by Chief Langalibalele of the *amaHlubi,* who provided food and temporary refuge, underscoring the continued role of African political hospitality in sustaining displaced communities. Their movement coincided with colonial efforts to reorganise African settlement, situating their journey within an expanding colonial spatial order. Subsequent

settlement at the Indaleni Mission Station along the Illovo River offered temporary security but no permanent land rights. Although colonial authorities praised the "Europeanisation" of Africans at Indaleni, tenure remained insecure, reinforcing a critical lesson that autonomy required land ownership beyond missionary control.

This realisation culminated in the founding of Edendale. On 19 November 1851, Allison and ninety African purchasers acquired the farm *Welverdiend* from Andries Pretorius for £1,300, payable in four annual instalments (Msimang, 1975). The purchase marked a decisive shift from missionary dependency to collective autonomy and entailed a final rupture with the Methodist Missionary Society. While the archive remains silent on perspectives from King Mswati's court and non-Christian actors, reflecting the epistemic erasures discussed in Chapter Two, Msimang's narrative functions as a counter-history. His account does not contradict Chapter Three's reconstruction. However, it deepens it by revealing how African Christians navigated spiritual aspiration and geopolitical survival within a colonial world increasingly hostile to African autonomy. The evidence demonstrates that African Christian engagement in Natal was neither a simple story of conversion nor one of epistemic surrender, but a historically situated process of learning, unlearning, and relearning through which African actors negotiated survival, belonging, and autonomy within colonial modernity (Asante, 1998; Chilisa, 2012; Etherington, 1971; Guy, 2009; Wiredu, 1997).

6.3 Edendale as a Project of Collective Learning and Autonomy (1851)

This section demonstrates that the establishment of Edendale in 1851 constituted a deliberate project of collective learning through which African actors reworked colonial legal, economic, and spatial systems in pursuit of autonomy. Rather than interpreting the purchase of *Welverdiend* as a discrete historical event, this discussion shows how Edendale's founders learned to engage colonial property regimes, unlearned reliance on missionary authority, and relearned community-making on terms that selectively drew upon residual African values of relationality and collective responsibility, values that would later be reinforced through interaction with Indigenous inhabitants who joined the settlement after 1851. In doing so, the section advances the central argument of this study that African communities who settled in Edendale after the original *amakholwa* settlers actively produced knowledge and strategy within conditions of colonial constraint, with AIKS continuity sustained by lineages predating both Pretorius and missionary settlement, as emphasised in Chapter Three. As demonstrated

in Chapter Three, the decision to acquire land by the original settlers through freehold purchase followed repeated experiences of spatial and political insecurity under mission control. While missions offered temporary refuge and access to literacy, they did not provide durable claims to land or self-governance.

Building on the argument in Chapter Two that colonial modernity sought to deny Africans juridical and epistemic maturity, the 1851 purchase represents a calculated engagement with colonial law rather than acquiescence to it (Asante, 1998; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The turn to freehold ownership thus reflects a learning process in which African actors selectively appropriated colonial legal instruments to secure collective survival. Archival evidence confirms that the acquisition of *Welverdiend* was organised and financed communally. According to Msimang, trust was placed in James Allison to hold title on behalf of the group, a legal arrangement necessitated by colonial restrictions that barred Africans from registering land in their own names prior to 1885 (Msimang, n.d.). Contributions were drawn from multiple sources, including the sale of cattle and produce, wage labour in Pietermaritzburg and on neighbouring farms, and income generated through domestic service and the sale of hay and thatch grass. While the official record lists only male purchasers, women's labour was integral to the transaction, revealing a disjuncture between colonial legal recognition and Indigenous moral economies.

Read through the lens developed in Chapter Two, this disjuncture reflects the tension between communal African epistemologies and colonial bureaucratic forms. AIKS emphasise collective responsibility and relational ownership, but engagement with colonial institutions required translation into individualised and gendered legal categories (Dei, 2012; Mbiti, 1990; Ramose, 1999). The absence of women's names from the land register, therefore, reflects not only colonial exclusion but the selective reconfiguration of Indigenous governance norms under juridical constraint. Nevertheless, as argued in Chapter Two, epistemic authority within African societies is not confined to written documentation but is sustained through collective memory and moral recognition (Dei, 2012; Ntseane, 2011). Oral histories within Edendale consistently affirm women's foundational role in securing the land, underscoring that ownership was understood as a shared, intergenerational achievement.

By 1858, the debt on *Welverdiend* had been fully repaid, aided by an interest-free loan from Governor Sir George Grey during a regional cattle plague (Etherington, 1971). The subsequent issuance of the 1861 Edendale Trust Deed formalised the subdivision of the land into individual freehold plots and constitutes one of the earliest instances of registered

African freehold ownership in colonial Natal (Natal Colonial Government, 1861). Although the deed reflects the gendered constraints of colonial law, it also provides material confirmation that Edendale's freehold was neither a gift nor a concession, but the outcome of sustained African initiative and collective discipline. The project of Edendale extended beyond land tenure to the deliberate construction of a self-governing social and spatial order. Msimang records that Georgetown was planned with designated sites for schools, churches, streets, and water furrows, reflecting an intentional vision of permanence and civic organisation (Msimang, n.d.-b). Skills in brickmaking, carpentry, surveying, and construction, acquired during the Indaleni period, were mobilised after 1851 to build freehold homes independently of missionary oversight. Interpreted through the Afrocentric framework developed in Chapter Four, this represents the learning phase of a process in which African subjects acquired externally introduced technical skills under colonial and missionary authority, within conditions that privileged Western knowledge systems while marginalising Indigenous epistemologies.

At the same time, autonomy was negotiated within constraints. Moral covenants regulating practices such as polygamy and beer brewing functioned as mechanisms of missionary discipline. Still, they also operated as strategic accommodations designed to secure tenure and recognition within a racially hostile colonial environment. This dynamic illustrates the processes of unlearning and relearning outlined in Chapter Four, as African residents navigated colonial expectations without relinquishing communal authority or long-term control over land.

Taken together, the archival record demonstrates that Edendale's establishment was not a passive incorporation into colonial modernity, nor a by-product of missionary benevolence. It was a collective epistemic project in which some African actors learned to work within colonial systems, unlearned dependency on missionary governance, and relearned community-making grounded in Indigenous values of relationality, responsibility, and intergenerational continuity. In this sense, Edendale stands as material evidence of African intellectual resilience and strategic learning, affirming the central claim of this study that history functions here not merely as narrative, but as a site of decolonial knowledge production. At the same time, the archival record suggests that, after the first wave of new Indigenous settlers following the 1860s depression, Edendale's settlement form was more hybrid than Msimang's idealised description of Georgetown implies. It is also evident from the photos below that the coexistence of planned urban elements alongside Indigenous spatial

practices indicates that the built environment itself reflected an ongoing negotiation between inherited African lifeways and selectively adopted colonial forms.

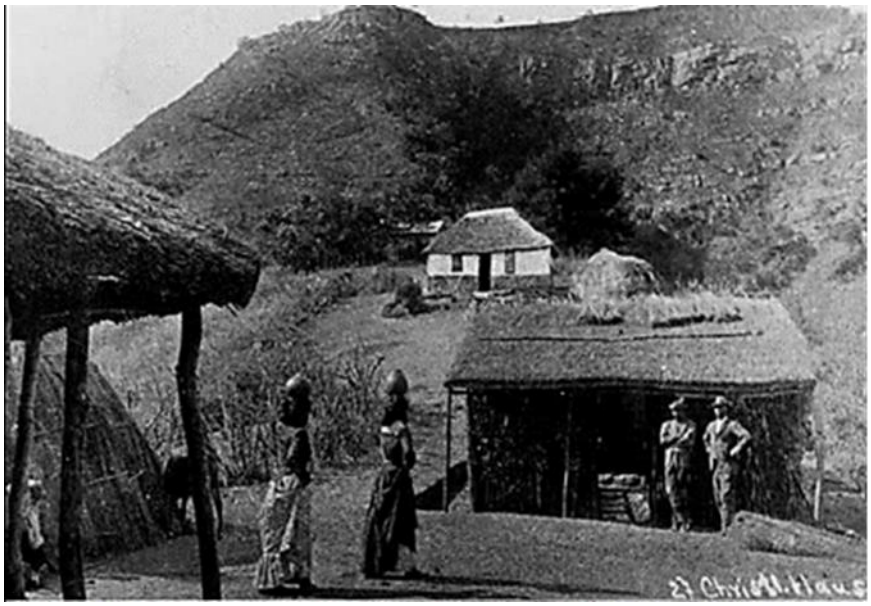


Figure 6.1: Kholwa Homestead, c.1880s-1900s (Pietermaritzburg Repository Archive)



Figure 6.2: Early mission station in Edendale, c.1930 (Pietermaritzburg Museum Library)

The first photograph (Figure 6-1) captures the material culture of Edendale after the first wave of new settlers, with thatched dwellings positioned alongside a European-style house, illustrating the hybrid character of mission-era settlement. The clothing worn by women and men reflects selective engagement with colonial norms of dress and respectability, while the open spatial layout, marked by the absence of fences or rigid boundaries, preserves African

relational patterns of community life organised through proximity and shared social space rather than enclosure. The second photograph (Figure 6-2) further illuminates the settlement's African spatial logic. It depicts the vernacular architecture and communal organisation of Edendale's early homes, where the absence of fences, the orientation of dwellings toward shared pathways, and the integration of cultivated gardens demonstrate a relational understanding of land.

As argued in Chapter Three, Edendale's founders appropriated colonial categories tactically, transforming freehold title, Christian respectability, and elements of urban planning into protective strategies against dispossession. The archival record largely supports this interpretation, yet significant silences also mark it. Women's substantial economic contributions to the land-purchase and settlement economy are not reflected in legal ownership records, mirroring the broader epistemic erasure of African women's agency in colonial documentation.

When read alongside Msimang's later reflection in *Reality* magazine, this pattern of selective visibility becomes clearer. Writing in October 1975, Msimang affirms that "the Settlement of Edendale… was established in 1851… [and] sub-divisions were transferred in freehold to individual owners" (Msimang, 1975, October, p. 12). Produced during the height of apartheid, this statement functions not as a neutral recollection but as an act of historical reaffirmation, asserting the legitimacy and longevity of African freehold ownership at a moment when such claims were politically threatened, while also excluding later settlers who moved onto the land. Collectively, the visual and written archive positions the founding of Edendale as a powerful counter-narrative to colonial historiography, which has often framed the settlement as an outcome of missionary benevolence or imperial charity. Instead, the evidence foregrounds African initiative, financial discipline, and territorial self-definition. This reading does not contradict Chapter Three; rather, it materially anchors it, demonstrating that Edendale's founding constituted an act of epistemic and territorial reclamation, precisely the form of agency this study seeks to recover.

6.4 Autonomy, *Unzondelelo*, and the Anglo-Zulu War (1870s-1879)

Chapter Three established that, according to the published account, the 1870s marked a turning point in Edendale's trajectory. Early prosperity increasingly gave way to settler

backlash, legal dualism, and the denial of municipal status, even as residents deepened their religious and civic self-organisation. The formation of *Unzondelelo* in 1875, together with Edendale's mobilisation during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, represents a strategic assertion of autonomy within a rapidly narrowing colonial horizon (Etherington, 1978; Meintjes, 2020).

Archival evidence both confirms and complicates this interpretation. The primary source for this moment is the *Address by Edendale Elders* (January 1879), a petition authored by propertied male leaders of the settlement and preserved in the Aitchison Collection (PC14/1/4/1/1) at the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives. As a contemporaneous document, it provides rare direct insight into how Edendale's elite framed their relationship with colonial authority during the Anglo-Zulu War. However, it also reflects a selective perspective: mission-educated landowners. The voices of the broader community, including women, tenants, and non-Christians, remain absent from this record.

In January 1879, as the Anglo-Zulu War loomed, Edendale elders addressed colonial authorities, declaring: "We shall gladly obey [the Queen] when she calls for the services of her Black children… We owe it all to the Government of the White Queen. We are her children" (Address by Edendale Elders, January 1879). This declaration reflects a broader pattern documented in Chapter Three, which notes that Edendale men, particularly *amakholwa* (Christian converts), participated in colonial military campaigns such as the Anglo-Zulu War (1879) and the Bhambatha Rebellion (1906), often in the hope of securing land rights, legal recognition, or protection under colonial rule, even as their individual motivations and voices were largely absent from official records (Meintjes, 2020). While this statement appears to express unconditional loyalty to imperial authority, such a reading risks obscuring the strategic political reasoning that informed it. As argued in Chapter Two, colonial rule frequently rode roughshod over Indigenous political systems, compelling African communities to adopt subtle, adaptive, and situational forms of resilience rather than open confrontation (Cooper & Stoler, 1997; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Mbembe, 2001).

Within this context, professions of loyalty functioned as calculated political performances, mobilising the language of imperial belonging to secure protection, safeguard land tenure, and minimise the risk of repression during moments of heightened colonial violence. Far from signalling ideological submission, such rhetoric exemplifies the negotiated forms of agency and resilience discussed in Chapter Two, through which African actors worked within colonial discourses to preserve autonomy and communal integrity (Cooper & Stoler, 1997;

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). This posture was echoed by Daniel Msimang during the Anglo-Zulu War, when he attributed the community's prosperity to "the Queen and the Missionary Society" (Msimang, n.d.-c).

While his language aligned closely with missionary pedagogy, it also illustrates how African Christians internalised and strategically deployed the moral economy of colonial civility: obedience and discipline offered in exchange for protection. Colonial authorities reciprocated selectively. In a manuscript titled *Zulu War of 1879*, Sir Garnet Wolseley praised Edendale as "the finest object lesson in Christian Missions" (Wolseley, n.d.). Although steeped in imperial paternalism, this recognition inadvertently acknowledged the settlement's disciplined self-governance, daily prayer routines, communal labour, and moral oversight.

While Edendale men participated in colonial military campaigns, as discussed in the published literature and evidenced by the 1906 photograph of the Edendale contingent during the Bambatha Rebellion (Pietermaritzburg Museum Library, 1906 – see Figure 6-3 in the following section), the names, voices, and motivations of individual African combatants are absent from the archival record. This silence reflects a broader pattern: colonial documentation recorded African service only in aggregate or through European narration, erasing personal subjectivity even when acknowledging bravery, a dynamic illustrated in Chapter Three through the case of Sergeant Major Simeon Kambule, whose documented valour was detached from his political consciousness in official accounts. This tension is further illuminated by Eric Matshatsha's 1995 oral history interview with historian Ruth Lundie (Matshatsha, 1995). As with Dlamini's interview discussed above, Matshatsa's interview was part of the post-apartheid effort to redress the absences in the apartheid archive. In this case, oral interviews were conducted for the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives. Reflecting retrospectively, Matshatsha observed that "the *amakholwa* were used by missionaries and colonial authorities to civilise the African people… they were also acting as a buffer against the Zulu kingdom". His account captures the painful duality of *amakholwa* identity: Christianity and education enabled mobility and protection, yet alignment with colonial structures produced estrangement from broader African society, where converts were sometimes labelled *amambuka* (traitors to ancestral life).

Internal hierarchies reinforced this estrangement. Matshatsha recalls in the interview, "They [*amakholwa*] saw themselves as better than other Africans… You had to wear a suit, attend church, and follow the rules", a standard that marked belonging within Edendale but deepened division beyond it. This duality, in which Christianity and education enabled

mobility yet produced alienation, aligns with Chapter Two's argument that colonial education functioned as epistemicide (Santos, 2014), devaluing AIKS by positioning European norms as universal (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Odora Hoppers, 2002). The *amakholwa* were interpellated into a colonial moral order that equated civilisation with Western dress, conduct, and church attendance, fostering internal hierarchies that estranged them from broader African society. As Chapter Two shows, this reflects the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), a condition in which African worth was measured through the coloniser's gaze. However, this was never total; even within hybridity, epistemic resilience (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) persisted, as converts navigated displacement without fully surrendering ancestral relationality.

Crucially, no archival records survive from rank-and-file volunteers in the war; elite-authored addresses and colonial commendations dominate the historical record. This absence reflects the broader epistemic erasure of African interiority under colonial rule, a silence that Chapter Two identifies as central to the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Nevertheless, when read together, these sources do not necessarily depict passive collaboration. They reveal a community navigating profound precarity, leveraging the language and rituals of colonial loyalty to preserve land, faith, and collective life. Edendale's wartime service was neither blind allegiance nor betrayal, but a situated strategy of survival – one that simultaneously enabled and constrained African agency. As argued in Chapter Three, such acts of conditional loyalty were not signs of assimilation but tactical performances within a violently racialised order to secure recognition without surrendering autonomy, even when that recognition remained structurally hollow (Meintjes, 2020; Etherington, 1978).

6.5 Colonial Backlash and the Freehold Paradox (1880s-1910)

In this section, I argue that the period from the 1880s to 1910 marked a decisive shift in colonial policy toward Edendale, from conditional tolerance to systematic containment. As African prosperity became visible through freehold landownership, skilled trades, literacy, and civic self-organisation, it was no longer celebrated as evidence of Christian civilisation but recast as a threat to racial and economic hierarchies. This section demonstrates how colonial authorities responded not by revoking rights outright, but by deploying legal dualism, educational restriction, and bureaucratic surveillance to hollow out the substance of African autonomy even as its formal trappings, such as title deeds, were preserved. Crucially,

this containment extended to the domain of knowledge production, where the very literacy and intellectual capacity once promoted as signs of progress were reinterpreted as dangerous when exercised independently of white oversight.

The archival evidence for this transition draws primarily from the Aitchison Collection at the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives, including H. Selby Msimang's published reflections in *Reality* magazine (1975), administrative correspondence from the Natal Native Affairs Department, and missionary records. These sources reveal a consistent pattern: state recognition of Edendale's achievements was increasingly performative, masking a deeper project of epistemic and institutional neutralisation.

Although Edendale residents held legally registered freehold titles, "subdivided and… transferred in freehold to individual owners" (Msimang, 1975, October, p. 12), they remained subject to Native Law, a body of customary legislation designed for rural reserve populations rather than urbanising Christian landowners as discussed in Chapter Three. According to Msimang, this legal dualism rendered ownership structurally hollow. Residents could buy and sell land, yet their marriages, inheritance, and civic status were adjudicated under a separate and subordinate legal regime. The paradox was profound. The very institutions that had enabled African autonomy, such as freehold tenure, literacy, and Christian respectability, became grounds for surveillance, restriction, and eventual containment.

This dynamic reflects the broader argument advanced in Chapter Two, that colonialism operated not only through land dispossession but through what Santos (2014) terms epistemicide, the systematic delegitimisation of AIKS through the imposition of Western epistemologies. Missionary education, initially presented as a path to inclusion, became a site of epistemic control once African learners began using literacy not merely to assimilate, but to assert intellectual and political agency (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Odora Hoppers, 2002). As Chapter Two shows, colonial education functioned as a technology of domination that positioned European knowledge as universal while framing African ways of knowing as anecdotal, superstitious, or irrational (Mudimbe, 1988; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

It is within this epistemic order that the colonial state's rejection of J. Nuttall's 1883 proposal, titled *Establishment of a Training School at Edendale for Native Teachers &c.*, to the Natal colonial government for an Edendale teacher training school must be situated. Nuttall sought funding to prepare African men as "preachers, pastors, and teachers for native churches and schools" (Minute Paper E.471/1883, Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository).

Lieutenant-Governor Sir Charles Bulwer's evasive response, "I cannot give grants for two Training Schools… I shall be prepared to consider the question…" effectively stalled the project (Bulwer, 1883). Nuttall clarified that the institution was "an entirely new and distinct enterprise" from existing primary schools, yet the state withheld support. This pattern, tacit approval paired with material denial, reveals that the colonial state welcomed African "progress" only insofar as it remained non-threatening. Training African teachers was perceived not as upliftment, but as a challenge to white intellectual authority. This containment targeted *amakholwa* intellectual sovereignty; specifically, the state feared African Christians producing autonomous knowledge within mission-derived frameworks. However, this suppression operated alongside, not instead of, the ongoing marginalisation of Indigenous inhabitants' knowledge systems operating outside mission structures. The colonial state thus deployed dual strategies: containing *amakholwa* advancement while erasing Indigenous epistemologies, a dynamic that created complex tensions within Edendale's social fabric.

As discussed in Chapter Two, while basic literacy and industrial training were permitted and even encouraged as tools for producing compliant labourers and loyal subjects (Etherington, 1978; Morris, 1976), any initiative that threatened to produce autonomous African intellectuals capable of critical thought, self-representation, or institutional leadership was swiftly contained. As argued in Chapter Two, colonial education was never simply about ignorance; it was about controlled knowledge. The state could tolerate Africans who internalised European norms as passive recipients, but it could not tolerate those who might reinterpret, critique, or rival the epistemic authority of white institutions. Thus, the rejection of Nuttall's proposal was not an exception to the logic of epistemicide; it was its culmination. Training African teachers would have enabled Edendale residents to control the very apparatus through which knowledge was validated and transmitted, thereby challenging the racial hierarchy underpinning colonial epistemology. In this light, the state's refusal confirms that African intellectual sovereignty, not just cultural difference, was the ultimate threat.

From the perspective of the learning-unlearning-relearning framework (Chapter Four), this moment exemplifies the limits of learning within a colonial order. Literacy and technical skill, acquired through mission schooling, were initially internalised as tools of advancement, a form of learning that aligned with colonial ideals of civility and productivity. But when these same tools were mobilised to claim epistemic sovereignty through teacher training, petitioning, and self-governance, they triggered containment. The state's refusal to fund

African-led education was not a policy failure. It was a deliberate strategy to ensure that learning remained bounded by dependency, never progressing to unlearning colonial hierarchies or to relearning African epistemic frameworks.

Thus, the 1880s-1910 period marks the consolidation of what Chapter Two identifies as the coloniality of knowledge, a system in which African intellectual capacity was tolerated only when it served colonial ends but suppressed when it threatened to generate autonomous thought. Edendale's freehold status, far from shielding it from this logic, made it a heightened target precisely because it demonstrated that African success required neither white supervision nor cultural surrender. The colonial response was not erasure, but enclosure, allowing the form of autonomy while draining it of substance.

Missionary records from the Aitchison Collection at the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives further illuminate the ideological framing of the withdrawal from the Mahamba mission station, following its destruction. In an undated manuscript by Selby Msimang, titled *The Mahamba Mission Account* (PC14/1/4/1/1), the destruction of the Mahamba station is described as a moment of trial for the Christian converts. Separately, Msimang records that James Allison hoped his Swazi converts would "spread Christian values and European customs in Natal" (Msimang, n.d.-c, p. 3). This formulation explicitly linked spiritual conversion to cultural assimilation, reflecting a missionary expectation that African Christians would internalise colonial norms as a condition of inclusion. According to Msimang (n.d.-c), this vision shaped the community's early engagement with mission education and land settlement as evidenced by State correspondence from the 1850s, which praised Allison's work "especially as regards the Europeanisation of the natives on his station" (Msimang, n.d.-c). By the 1880s, however, even this conditional inclusion was being withdrawn.

As Selby Msimang later recalled in his autobiographical narrative (Msimang, 1974), African success in commerce, landholding, and skilled labour increasingly provoked suspicion rather than admiration. White artisans and farmers began to frame Edendale residents as unfair competitors, accusing them of leveraging missionary privilege to invade economic spaces reserved for whites – an anxiety echoed in colonial correspondence of the period, according to Msimang. The colonial state responded not by affirming African property rights, but by tightening administrative control, cloaking racial unease in the language of public order, economic fairness, and moral supervision (Msimang, 1974). This discursive shift from overt

racial exclusion to technocratic containment foreshadowed the bureaucratic rationalities of later segregation and apartheid.

Nevertheless, African agency persisted within these constraints. Petitions from Edendale landowners during this period are referenced in later Advisory Board minutes as foundational to the community's long-standing demand for communal exemption from Native Law, a claim rooted not in the rejection of custom, but in the assertion that freehold status conferred a distinct legal identity (Msimang, 1975). More overt forms of political positioning complemented this juridical strategy. Edendale residents repeatedly demonstrated public support for the colonial state, most notably in 1906, when the community dispatched a volunteer contingent to assist government forces during the Bambatha Rebellion. Such actions were calculated affirmations of civic respectability and political reliability, intended to reinforce Edendale's claim to differentiate legal treatment as a freehold settlement. Through both petitioning and visible cooperation, residents sought to secure recognition, protection, and exemption from the homogenising category of Native governance.

The period from the 1880s to 1910, therefore, marks a pivotal transition. Edendale's conditional autonomy gave way to institutionalised containment as the colonial state, unable to tolerate African success on its own terms, redefined the settlement not as evidence of African capacity but as a problem to be managed. This logic would culminate in the *Natives Land Act of 1913*, which retroactively cast Edendale's 1851 land purchase as a historical anomaly and laid the groundwork for its eventual absorption into South Africa's racialised land regime.

6.6 Union, the 1913 Land Act, and Civic Resistance (1910-1948)

This section examines the period 1910-1948 to demonstrate how Edendale navigated the transition from conditional colonial autonomy to increasing administrative containment, while African agency persisted. By foregrounding archival evidence, the section highlights the community's strategic assertion of civic rights, the protection of land ownership, and the cultivation of epistemic and political resilience practices that laid the structural groundwork for the resistance to apartheid interventions analysed in Section 6.7.

By 1948, Edendale had already been rendered governable through advisory bodies, spatial restriction, and paternalistic oversight, even as its legal status as freehold land remained

intact. This unresolved tension between formal recognition of freehold on the one hand and systematic administrative containment on the other formed the structural precondition for apartheid's later interventions. The period 1910-1948 thus marks a decisive transition. Edendale's conditional autonomy under colonial governance gave way to institutionalised containment, yet African agency persisted through petitions, welfare organising, and sustained claims to dignity, land, and self-determination.

Within this emerging national order, Edendale's anomalous status as an African freehold settlement in a white-governed province increasingly became a problem to be managed rather than a model to be emulated. As discussed in Chapter Three, the *Natives Land Act of 1913*, although primarily targeting rural reserves, retroactively reframed Edendale's 1851 land purchase as a historical exception, laying the groundwork for its gradual absorption into a racialised spatial order. Archival evidence both confirms and sharpens this trajectory. Sources include Advisory Board records (Msimang, n.d.-d), official correspondence (Natal Colonial Secretary's Office, 1883; Dube, 1913, November 24), government memoranda (Local Health Commission, 1952, April), and local newspapers (*Ilanga laseNatal*, 1952, February 22; Nyembezi, 1983, January 20), which collectively document both state actions and community responses.

On 12 February 1913, Rev. John L. Dube, founding president of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) (which subsequently became the African National Congress (ANC)), submitted a petition to the Natal Native Affairs Department on behalf of Chief Sandanazwe and approximately 50 followers who had been forcibly evicted from 'Evansdale' an extension of broader Edendale zone**,** near Pietermaritzburg (Dube, 1913). Dube's letter meticulously documented the eviction, appealed to earlier Crown assurances of protection, and sought redress through formal legal channels. The state's response was silence, a pattern which, as argued in Chapter Three, exemplifies how dispossession operated not only through statute but through bureaucratic deferral, referral, and inaction (Meintjes, 2020; Epprecht, 2016). This legal erasure was compounded by administrative reclassification. Although Edendale retained its freehold titles, it was designated a *scheduled native area* under the 1913 Act and reaffirmed as such under the *Native Trust and Land Act of 1936* (Msimang, 1975). Although the archival record suggests that the process was not necessarily rapid, this classification blocked spatial expansion, accelerated overcrowding, and severed Edendale's legal distinction from reserve populations, despite its long-standing history of self-governance, property ownership, and civic infrastructure.

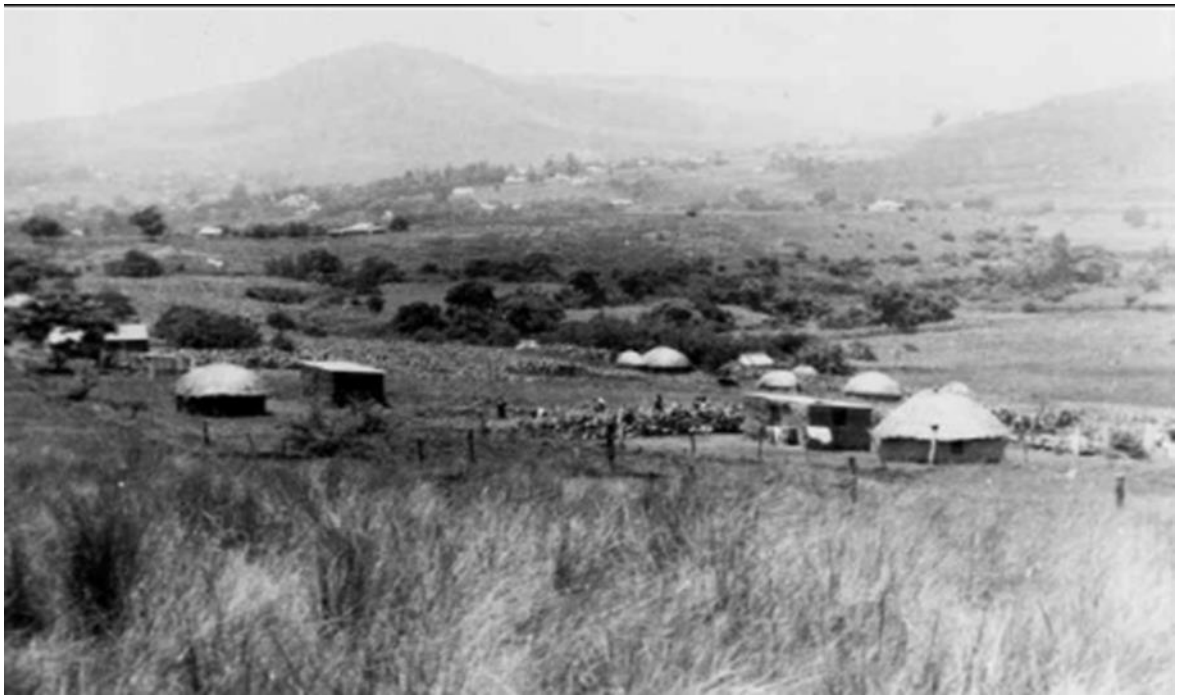


Figure 6.3: Edendale, c. 1930 – Georgetown nestled at the foot of a hill (Pietermaritzburg Museum)

This panoramic view shows Georgetown at the base of a hill, surrounded by cultivated fields and open land. Its orderly layout and visible expansion contradict colonial portrayals of African settlements as chaotic. However, the encircling hills subtly mirror the legal and spatial containment Edendale faced under Native Law and municipal exclusion, as well as the increasing pressure on the land as more and more people moved into the area.

The human consequences of this containment are starkly captured in *Ikhwezi*, which reported in 1952: "The position has been seriously aggravated by the laws of the land such as the Natives' Land Act (1913), and the Native Urban Areas Act, which have brought pressure on Africans to leave towns, settling just on the outskirts where they constitute what are known as Black Belts" (Local Health Commission, 1952, April, p. 3). As Selby Msimang later observed, when Pietermaritzburg had perforce to clear up slum conditions within her perimeter, Edendale became the dumping ground. Worse slums developed (Msimang, 1974, September 19).

However, the archive also records persistent African agency under conditions of constraint: during the 1940s, Edendale residents, particularly the descendants of Allison's followers, increasingly articulated claims to civic participation grounded in freehold ownership rather than supplication. On 30 June 1942, property owners formally petitioned the Natal Provincial Administration for "direct representation [on the newly established Local Health

Commission] … and to share fully in the administration of the area" (Msimang, n.d.-d), citing their freehold status as the basis for inclusion in the governance of their own area. Their argument was unambiguous: if the Commission could levy rates on their properties, then residents possessed a corresponding right to participate in fiscal and policy decisions. This was not a request for benevolence but an assertion of civic personhood – a refusal to be governed as subjects without voice. This assertion of civic personhood, grounded in the material reality of freehold ownership and the moral logic of taxation without representation, was not an isolated plea but part of a longer arc of African resistance to epistemic and political subjugation. As argued in Chapter Two, colonialism sought not only to dispossess land but to erase African agency by rendering Indigenous knowledge systems and governance structures illegitimate (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Santos, 2014). However, African communities consistently refused this erasure, engaging in what Cooper and Stoler (1997) term "everyday forms of resistance" – subtle, persistent acts of self-assertion that preserved dignity even under constraint.

The Edendale petitioners' demand for direct representation was precisely such an act: a refusal to accept the contradiction of being taxed as property owners while treated as political nonentities. This aligns with the broader pattern identified in Chapter Two, where African agency persisted not through grand rupture alone, but through sustained, situated negotiation in what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) calls "epistemic resilience": the quiet yet unwavering insistence on intellectual and civic sovereignty despite systemic delegitimisation. By invoking their freehold status as grounds for participation, Edendale residents were not merely seeking inclusion in a colonial institution; they were reasserting a foundational principle of African political life – that governance must be reciprocal, accountable, and rooted in the consent of the governed (Dei, 2012). This stance stood in stark contrast to the paternalistic model proposed by colonial authorities. The state's response to the petition took the form of a constrained compromise. Rather than granting representation with executive authority, officials offered an Advisory Board devoid of decision-making power. Addressing an Edendale deputation in October 1950, Provincial Administrator Douglas Mitchell urged the community to accept the newly formed Advisory Board, framing it as a benevolent concession: "We want you to help… we are advising you to accept the principle as a first step along the line of apprenticeship… As time goes on, they will give you more and more of the responsibility and the work and give you control of your settlement out there" (quoted in Msimang, n.d.-d, p. 2).

According to Msimang, residents accepted this arrangement not as an endorsement of paternalism but as a strategic foothold, interpreting the promise as a trustee-ward relationship that would culminate in full responsibility (Msimang, 1974). Educational neglect further exposed the limits of this promised inclusion. The Local Health Commission's own journal, *Ikhwezi*, reported in 1952 that "children are writing on their knees because there are no desks" (Local Health Commission, 1952, p. 9). In response to such conditional offers and the material hardships they reflected, H. Selby Msimang had already taken autonomous action. In 1944, he conducted a house-to-house poverty survey across Edendale, and on 15 March 1945, he founded the Edendale & District Benevolent Society. The Society's mission was explicitly communal: to assist "widows, orphans, invalids and such other necessitous persons" (Edendale & District Benevolent Society, 1945, p. 1). This initiative exemplified an African epistemology of care rooted in collective responsibility, *Ujamaa* and *Ubuntu*, rather than colonial charity. Far from waiting for state permission to govern their social welfare, residents built parallel institutions of mutual aid, asserting that self-determination began not with state recognition, but with community solidarity.

However, when the society later applied for a grant, its request was rejected by the Local Health Commission because "the community could not be effectively managed without the supervision of a white person" (Msimang, 1974, p. 5). This statement exposed the racial logic embedded within welfare governance, where African self-reliance could be acknowledged in practice but was never regarded as legitimate or trustworthy. Rather than recognising demonstrated competence and organisational capacity, colonial authorities continued to frame African initiatives as inherently deficient. This episode reflects the broader dynamic identified in Chapter Two, in which colonial and postcolonial institutions systematically delegitimised African agency despite clear evidence of organisation, discipline, and collective responsibility. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argues, coloniality operates not only through overt exclusion but through a persistent refusal to recognise African epistemic and organisational sovereignty, even when it is concretely demonstrated. At the same time, the belief in African ownership through self-purchase resonated widely in African public discourse during the mid-twentieth century. This conviction was sustained in community memory and articulated through African-language newspapers such *as Ilanga laseNatal*, which consistently affirmed land ownership, self-help, and collective responsibility as legitimate foundations of African modernity.

A recurring declaration of the era captured this ethos: "*Umhlaba akuyona inkosikazi yakithi emhlabeni? Singakuthenga ngokuzenzela, kanti singawuthengisi nakho!*" ("Is the land not our bride on this earth? We can buy it by our own hands and we will not sell it!") (*Ilanga laseNatal*, 1952, February 22, p. 4). Edendale embodied this principle: its freehold was not a colonial concession, but a covenant forged through communal purchase. This claim was repeatedly tested under apartheid, which responded not with outright revocation, but with paternalistic deferral. The state's refusal to grant Edendale substantive self-governance mirrored its broader strategy of containment: offering symbolic inclusion while denying real authority. Although the Edendale Advisory Board repeatedly petitioned for a transition from advisory to decision-making powers, its requests were met with bureaucratic delay (Msimang, 1975). This pattern had deep roots. Although Edendale's freehold status initially shielded it from direct municipal control, the state increasingly sought to subordinate its self-governance to colonial oversight. As discussed above, by the 1950s, proposals to establish an Advisory Board under the Native Administration framework were met with resistance from residents who saw them as a threat to their autonomy (Msimang, n.d.-d, p. 2).

This confirmed that the state would tolerate African autonomy only insofar as it remained performative rather than political. Although the archive rarely includes internal communal debates, particularly those involving women, tenants, and non-Christians, the archive shows how Edendale's residents repurposed constrained institutional spaces. The Advisory Board, though stripped of executive power, became a platform for critique, persistent petitioning, and the juridical assertion of rights grounded in the 1851 purchase. As recorded in H. Selby Msimang's account, board members repeatedly invoked their freehold title to challenge state encroachment, declaring in a 1951 meeting: "We are not location people… we bought this land with our own money" (Msimang, n.d.-d, p. 5). Minutes from Advisory Board gatherings (PC14/1/4/1/7) further show sustained efforts to petition the Provincial Administration over land valuation, infrastructure neglect, and threats of incorporation into the KwaZulu Bantustan, actions that transformed the Board from a colonial advisory body into a vehicle for collective resistance. In doing so, the community turned bureaucratic enclosure into a site of resilience, insisting that self-governance was not a privilege to be granted, but a right earned through self-definition, collective memory, and sustained resistance. This resilience is characteristic of African/Indigenous communities, as I argued in Chapter Two (Cooper & Stoler, 1997; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

Despite the perpetual deferral of autonomy in the state's promise of "apprenticeship", Edendale's leaders continued to insist that freehold status conferred not only property rights but political ones. Their struggle was not for inclusion on colonial terms, but for recognition on their own. This unresolved tension – between formal acknowledgement of freehold on the one hand and systematic administrative containment on the other formed the structural precondition for apartheid's later interventions. By 1948, Edendale had already been rendered governable through advisory bodies, spatial restriction, and paternalistic oversight, even as its legal status as freehold land remained intact. It is this contradiction that the apartheid state would inherit and intensify, transforming earlier mechanisms of deferral into more aggressive strategies of territorial absorption, bureaucratic control, and epistemic erasure, as examined in Section 6.7.

6.7 Apartheid Containment and the Fight for Freehold (1948-1994)

This section examines how apartheid governance between 1948 and 1994 intensified earlier colonial strategies of containment, focusing on the systematic attempt to dissolve Edendale's freehold status and absorb the settlement into the bureaucratic architecture of segregation. It situates these developments within the chapter's central argument that Edendale's history is defined by adaptive, historically grounded defence rather than passive decline, showing how African landholding, governance, and knowledge practices were continually recalibrated under constraint to preserve communal autonomy and historical continuity**.** In line with Chapters Two and Three, the section demonstrates the persistent negotiation of African autonomy under increasingly repressive structures.

Mabin (1983) and Posel (2001) establish that apartheid was not merely a regime of racial segregation but a project of bureaucratic and territorial re-engineering, designed to dismantle African claims to land, governance, and historical continuity. In this context, Edendale, which remained legally freehold, became a site of acute tension. Its continued existence contradicted the apartheid state's insistence on rigid racial categorisation. Legislative instruments such as the Group Areas Act, the Bantu Authorities system, and urban redevelopment schemes were deployed not only to control space but also to erode the legitimacy of African land ownership retroactively.

Archival records from this period, such as Advisory Board minutes, newspapers, and publications such as *Ikhwezi*, followed the already established pattern of disproportionately reflecting the voices of male property owners and educated elites, while women, tenants, and the urban poor appear only marginally. Nonetheless, even within these constraints, the archive reveals a community that rejected the binary of resistance or acquiescence. Instead, Edendale residents practised adaptive defence through petitions, legal argument, public testimony, and strategic realignment to protect both land and the moral claim to self-determination.

Thus, the period from 1948 to 1994 should not be read as one of simple decline but of persistent recalibration. Edendale's struggle was not to overturn apartheid outright but to preserve the integrity of its 1851 foundation, a covenant of land, community, and autonomy. Freehold title functioned not merely as a legal instrument but as a living historical memory and a refusal to be reduced to a Bantu subject. In sustaining that refusal, Edendale maintained a form of epistemic sovereignty even as the ground beneath it was progressively unsettled. The archival record for this period is drawn primarily from the minutes, correspondence, and memoranda of the Edendale and District Advisory Boards housed in the Aitchison Collection at the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives. These Advisory Boards functioned as intermediary structures imposed by the state to manage African urban areas while withholding executive power. Although limited in authority, they became important sites through which residents articulated legal arguments, documented grievances, and challenged administrative encroachment using the state's own bureaucratic language. Reading these records in context reveals sustained civic mobilisation grounded in legal self-awareness and historical memory rather than in compliance.

In October 1951, the Advisory Boards issued a joint appeal to the Minister of Native Affairs rejecting the extension of the *Natives Urban Areas Act* to Edendale. The letter asserted that Edendale, being a released area held in freehold by African people, provided the only place where Africans could obtain asylum (Msimang, n.d.-d, p. 6). This appeal did not merely oppose influx control but reasserted Edendale's foundational principle of land as refuge. The Boards simultaneously demanded access to building loans from commercial banks, grounding their claim not in dependency but in the rights associated with property ownership. The state's failure to respond exposed the emptiness of its nominal recognition of African freehold status. This strategic use of freehold title was not an appeal for charity but a demand for the full set of rights associated with ownership in a capitalist society, including access to

credit, municipal services, and self-governance. As Meintjes (2020) argues, Edendale's leaders understood that a title without institutional support was meaningless. Epprecht (2016) similarly demonstrates how residents used petitions, legal arguments, and public declarations to insist that the 1851 purchase constituted a binding covenant rather than a provisional privilege. This pattern of symbolic recognition followed by material dispossession became characteristic of apartheid governance in Edendale.

In October 1965, Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner J. O. Cornell publicly assured residents through *The Natal Witness* that they would not forfeit their freehold rights if Edendale were incorporated into a Bantu homeland (Cornell, 1965). At the same time, he confirmed Edendale's incorporation into Released Area No. 55 under the South African Bantu Trust. He indicated that non-African residents would be relocated to appropriate group areas over time. These assurances masked a deeper administrative intent to purify and racially absorb Edendale into the homeland system. By the early 1970s, these contradictions gave way to open betrayal. On 1 April 1974, the Natal Provincial Administration dissolved the Local Health Commission, the last remaining structure of local self-governance, and transferred authority to the Drakensberg Bantu Affairs Administration Board (Msimang, 1974). Although roads were upgraded, the cost was severe: entire residential plots were confiscated without compensation (Estates Department, 1974, p. 3). In a retrospective account, Selby Msimang described the transfer as a flagrant violation of the 1942 promise that advisory participation would culminate in self-administration (Msimang, n.d.-a, p. 2).

Faced with this rupture, the community adjusted its strategy. Recognising that autonomy under white provincial administration was no longer possible, Msimang proposed a tactical transfer to the KwaZulu jurisdiction to establish a town council and escape perpetual paternalism (Msimang, 1974, p. 3). According to Msimang, this was not an endorsement of Bantustan ideology but a pragmatic attempt to recover administrative space. As Msimang stressed, residents remained proud of their freehold ownership and sought only the conditions necessary to exercise it meaningfully.

Apartheid's containment extended beyond land into education. As discussed in Chapter Three, the *Bantu Education Act of 1953* dismantled mission schooling, replacing it with a system designed to train rather than educate, severing knowledge from critique and embedding racial hierarchy (Epprecht, 2016; Kallaway, 2002). This was built upon earlier colonial epistemicide by privileging European rationality and written knowledge while marginalising AIKS grounded in oral, communal, and spiritual modes of knowing (Ngũgĩ wa

Thiong'o, 1986; Odora Hoppers, 2002; Santos, 2014). Within the framework of learning-unlearning-relearning discussed in Chapter Four, this represents the enforced learning of Eurocentric epistemic dominance.

According to Msimang (1974; 1975), Edendale Technical School became a site of depoliticised vocational training detached from community history. Despite this institutional erasure, elders preserved counter-knowledge through oral transmission. As discussed in Chapter Two, oral tradition within AIKS serves as a structured, epistemologically robust mode of knowledge continuity (Dei, 2012; Falola, 2022). Through storytelling, ritual, apprenticeship, and intergenerational teaching, elders maintained historical consciousness despite institutional erasure. Eric Matshatsha (1995) recalled that youth were taught critical histories of land purchase, displacement, and resistance, forming a living curriculum beyond formal schooling. Crucially, oral transmission was dynamic and performative. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Thao (2006) observes that oral tradition transforms knowledge through repetition, performance, and memorisation, adapting meaning to new contexts while preserving core ethical and ontological commitments. In Edendale, elders' retention of land-purchase narratives, spiritual practices, and histories of resistance illustrates the "living archive" function of oral tradition described in Chapter Two, sustaining AIKS against institutional erasure (Dei, 2012; Ntseane, 2011).

The state's legal assault intensified during the 1980s. Under the *Cooperation and Development Act*, officials proposed replacing freehold title deeds with deeds of grant, effectively transforming owners into state tenants. At a public meeting in 1983, Advisory Board Chair Professor Sibusiso Nyembezi warned that accepting these regulations would amount to surrendering Edendale's freehold rights (Nyembezi, 1983, January 20). His declaration that the land was held by purchase and not by permission directly echoed Msimang's earlier arguments, demonstrating how historical memory functioned as both juridical and moral defence. Alongside legislative manoeuvres, forced removals occurred on the peripheries of Edendale. Between 1971 and 1975, families in Mount Partridge and Wilgefontein were evicted to enable the expansion of Imbali township. Although framed as slum clearance, archival evidence suggests these removals were part of a broader strategy to consolidate African populations into state-controlled townships while retaining Edendale as a managed and gradually hollowed space.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented archival evidence in alignment with the narrative arc of Chapter Three, from precolonial Natal through the apartheid era, not to replicate history but to interrogate the archive as a contested terrain of memory, power, and agency. By anchoring each period in specific attributed sources, including petitions, letters, newspaper reports, Advisory Board minutes, and unpublished manuscripts, the chapter has demonstrated where archival records corroborate, complicate, or contradict the published historiography and where silences persist. The evidence confirms that the people of Edendale were never passive recipients of missionary benevolence or colonial policy.

At the same time, the archive demonstrates two distinct yet intersecting epistemic trajectories within Edendale's history. The first is that of the original *amakholwa*, Allison's followers and their descendants, including figures such as Msimang, whose engagement with Christianity and colonial modernity involved constrained negotiation within already ruptured epistemic frameworks. Missionary enculturation had disrupted direct intergenerational transmission of precolonial knowledge systems prior to their 1851 settlement; their pursuit of literacy, landownership, and civic recognition, therefore, enabled partial mobility while also producing forms of alienation and dependency shaped by missionary discipline and colonial governance (Matshatsha, 1995).

The second, less visible but more enduring trajectory concerns the continuity of AIKS among descendants of the area's precolonial inhabitants, families who occupied the Msunduzi valley before Pretorius's land grant and later entered Edendale as labourers, tenants, or residents through late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century land subdivisions. Their epistemic traditions survived displacement not through missionary mediation but through oral transmission, ritual practice, and communal memory sustained outside mission control. It is this second trajectory that constitutes the living epistemic foundation for contemporary rehumanisation in Edendale, as the resilience documented in Chapter Seven derives primarily from these lineages rather than from *amakholwa* Christianity itself.

From the 1851 collective purchase of *Welverdiend* (Msimang, n.d.-e) to the 1879 wartime declarations of conditional loyalty (Address by Edendale Elders, 1879, January), the 1913 petition by Rev. John L. Dube on behalf of Chief Sandanazwe (Dube, 1913, November 24), the 1945 establishment of the Edendale and District Benevolent Society (Edendale and District Benevolent Society, 1945, March 15), the 1951 demand for building loans (Msimang,

n.d.-d, p. 5), and Prof. S. Nyembezi's 1983 defence of freehold title (Nyembezi, 1983, January 20), residents consistently asserted autonomy through juridical, institutional, and discursive means. African agency emerges not as a moment of rupture but as a persistent, situated negotiation within constrained fields of power. This pattern confirms the arguments of Dei (2012), Ntseane (2011), and Ramose (1999) that African agency operates through enduring epistemic resilience, in which Indigenous knowledges and governance practices are rearticulated rather than erased under colonialism. As established in Chapter Two, African political life is rooted in relational accountability, collective memory, and land-based sovereignty principles that Edendale residents continually invoked across time. Chapter Three further demonstrates that missionary and colonial institutions were not simply imposed but functioned as contested spaces in which African actors selectively engaged external frameworks to protect communal autonomy. The archive thus reveals not passive assimilation but a sustained praxis of reclamation that affirms African epistemic agency.

At the same time, the archive reveals a consistent pattern in which African success provoked containment. Attributes celebrated in the 1850s, such as literacy, Christianity, and land ownership, became sources of suspicion by the 1880s, legal exclusion after 1913, and bureaucratic erasure by the 1970s. However, Edendale residents repeatedly reclaimed their foundational covenant, asserting land as refuge, ownership as right, and community as self-governing. Their articulation of belonging through purchase was juridical rather than nostalgic, grounded in historical deeds that predated apartheid and the Union.

However, an emphasis on Edendale's distinctiveness, particularly landownership, literacy, and respectability, carries analytical risks. As argued in Chapter Two, an Afrocentric critique must resist internalising colonial metrics of value that measure African legitimacy by proximity to Western norms (Dei, 2012; Ntseane, 2011). The language of ownership through purchase risks framing legitimacy in terms of colonial property law, potentially marginalising Indigenous conceptions of land as relational, ancestral, and non-commodifiable (Ramose, 1999). Similarly, contrasts drawn between Edendale residents and other Africans echo missionary hierarchies that positioned *amakholwa* as models of civility. While tactically effective in resisting dispossession, such distinctions risk obscuring broader African solidarities.

From an Afrocentric standpoint, Edendale's resistance must therefore be understood not as exceptionalism but as one expression of a wider African epistemic insistence on self-definition. At its strongest, this insistence transcends the colonial grammar of rights and

recognition to affirm communal being and *Ubuntu* over juridical individualism. This demands decolonial humility, honouring Edendale's strategies without allowing them to eclipse other modes of African resistance rooted in oral tradition, spiritual sovereignty, or non-landed forms of belonging.

The gaps in the archive remain significant. The voices of women, tenants, and spiritual leaders are underrepresented, with the record dominated by male, propertied, Christian elites. However, even within these limitations, the documents reveal efforts to repurpose advisory roles as sites of critique, welfare initiatives as enactments of Ubuntu, and petitions as claims of civic personhood. These strategies, however, also carry epistemic risk, as framing resistance through colonial juridical categories could inadvertently reinforce the hierarchies they sought to challenge. As Chapter Two argues, Afrocentric epistemology requires attention not only to what was done but to the logics through which action became legible.

Within this context, Msimang's manuscripts function as a vital counter-archive precisely because they represent the *amakholwa* perspective, which is largely absent from the oral history data. However, this voice must be positioned with analytical precision. As a descendant of Allison's settlers rather than of the area's precolonial inhabitants, Msimang documents African agency, land claims, and historical memory within frameworks already shaped by missionary enculturation. His narrative contests colonial historiography, but it does so from within epistemically transformed conditions, representing negotiation within rupture rather than the unbroken continuity of precolonial Indigenous knowledge systems.

In sum, this chronological re-presentation does not elevate Edendale as an exceptional African community but interrogates how African actors navigated, repurposed, and resisted colonial structures on their own terms, even when compelled to speak within colonial languages of recognition. Consistent with Chapter Two, such acts are not evidence of assimilation but strategic enactments of self-definition within constrained conditions. At the same time, the chapter exposes the archive's limits, which amplify certain voices while silencing others. Epistemic justice, therefore, requires reading both presence and absence, not to celebrate success but to ask whose knowledge counts as resistance. Even in fragmented form, the archive reveals a community persistently asserting its humanity not as recipients of colonial benevolence but as authors of its own historical becoming.

Data Presentation

7.1 Introduction

Chapter Six presented and analysed archival data, treating the archive as both empirical evidence and epistemological terrain, recentering African epistemic agency by theorising learning as a decolonial process. Rather than a neutral repository, the archive was approached as a contested site where power, knowledge, and meaning were produced, negotiated, and resisted.

This chapter presents findings from oral history interviews, the Transect Walk, and the River of Life workshop conducted with knowledge holders in the Edendale community. As I stated in Chapter One, one of my primary aims in this study was to re-centre African epistemic agency within the historical and contemporary context of Edendale. These methods enabled the knowledge holders to narrate, map, and interpret their lived experiences of AIKS, providing a holistic understanding of how knowledge is remembered and practised in a space shaped by deep historical layers. It is important to note that, based on the generated data, the name Edendale was introduced by the missionary group led by James Allison; the place itself existed long before this renaming and long before its later allocation to Andries Pretorius, as discussed in Chapters Three and Six. As a result, the knowledge holders speak from hybridised positionalities, drawing simultaneously on pre-colonial African memory systems and on the Christian and Western institutional structures that later became embedded in community life. The concepts used in this chapter, Western education, individualism, African identity, culture, mental colonisation, African ways, and restoration, are presented as articulated by the knowledge holders, reflecting their lived experiences and emic understandings. For analytical clarity, these terms correspond to the conceptual frameworks developed in Chapters 2 and 4: *Western education* refers to colonial schooling that privileged European epistemologies; *individualism* denotes the erosion of Ubuntu-based communal ethics; *African identity* and *African ways* signify the relational foundations of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS); *mental colonisation* describes the internalisation of epistemic inferiority; and *restoration* refers to the forward-looking regeneration of African epistemic sovereignty rather than a nostalgic return to the past. Their full theoretical interpretation is reserved for Chapter 8 through the Afrocentric Learning–Unlearning–Relearning (LUR) analytical framework.

The chapter incorporates direct quotations from knowledge holders, drawn from oral history interview data, the Transect Walk, and the River of Life workshop, to foreground their interpretations of historical continuity, cultural transformation, and the shifting role of Indigenous knowledge within Edendale. At the same time, these narratives are engaged critically rather than treated as transparent or static representations of the past. In response to Chapter Two's discussion of knowledge as contextually situated and shaped by power, history, and relational experience, the chapter approaches oral accounts as dynamic epistemic practices through which AIK is remembered, negotiated, and reconstituted in conditions marked by coloniality and epistemic hierarchy (Asante, 2009; Dei, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Quijano, 2000). In this way, the chapter recognises knowledge holders not merely as sources of data, but as active epistemic agents whose narratives reflect both continuity and rupture in the transmission of Indigenous knowledge. To situate these insights, the chapter begins with a demographic profile of the knowledge holders, followed by a presentation of the findings organised into interconnected themes that trace the trajectory of Indigenous knowledge in Edendale from its pre-colonial foundations, through missionary and colonial disruption, to contemporary expressions of resilience, hybridity, and cultural revival.

7.2 The Data Generation Process in Practice

As discussed in Chapter Five, the data generation process was conducted through oral history interviews, a Transect Walk, and a River of Life workshop, but implementation was uneven. Not all ten knowledge holders completed all three interview stages, and only four participated in the Transect Walk; just ten attended the River of Life session – far fewer than planned – due to community obligations, health constraints, and unforeseen events such as a local death. Transcription and translation also faced delays due to the Research Team's availability. These adaptations, while diverging from the original design, reflected the study's commitment to relational ethics and Afrocentric principles of *ukweli* (truth in context) and *utulivu* (justice through responsiveness), ensuring the research remained accountable to community rhythms rather than rigid protocols.

7.3 Demographic Profile of Knowledge Holders

The following table provides the demographic details of the knowledge holders involved in the study:

Table 7.1: Demographic profile of knowledge holders

Knowledge Holder	Gender	Age (2025)	Involvement in data generation	Primary Contributions to the Study
KH1	Female	65	First, Second, Third	Cultural rituals (*umemulo*, *umhlonyane*); church history; community organising (grannies' gymnastics)
KH2	Male	61	First, Second	YMCA history; youth mentorship; advocacy for cultural education ("We must teach children our culture…")
KH3	Female	62	First, Second, Third Transect Walk River of Life workshop	Indigenous mentorship (*iqhikiza*); ancestral practices (*umsamo*); community sports and cultural advocacy
KH4	Male	86	First, Second Transect Walk River of Life workshop	Pre-colonial land governance; Zondi chieftaincy; YMCA and Methodist Church history; ballroom dance instructor
KH5	Female	77	First, Second Transect Walk River of Life workshop	Storytelling (*izinganekwane*); reflections on IK integration; church-based schooling experience
KH6	Male	79	First, Second, Third, Transect Walk River of Life workshop	Identity pedagogy (*izithakazelo*); Sunday School teaching; music and intergenerational knowledge transmission
KH7	Male	70	First, Second, Third	Pre-colonial sovereignty (Queen Machibisa); mental colonisation; African healing knowledge
KH8	Male	73	First, Second	Zondi clan lineage; rites of passage (*umhlonyane*, *entabeni*); advocacy for cultural workshops
KH9	Male	64	First	YMCA and Wadley Stadium sports; emphasis on discipline through the church-school complex
KH10	Male	63	First	Arts and culture participation: reflection on religion-education integration in early schooling

The purposeful sampling strategy adopted in the study, as discussed in Chapter Five, involved the deliberate selection of participants based on three key criteria: (1) long-term residency in Edendale; (2) descent from the original *amakholwa* settlers; and (3) recognised roles as faith-based or cultural custodians, such as church leaders and elders entrusted with communal memory. This strategy was designed to ensure that the knowledge holders possessed deep intergenerational insight into both the historical and contemporary dynamics of AIKS in Edendale, thereby aligning with the study's Afrocentric commitment to epistemic authenticity, cultural continuity, and contextual relevance. As discussed in Chapters One and Five, it ultimately proved impossible to include any direct descendants of Allison's original followers, since there are no longer any living in Edendale. As can be seen, the study included ten Black African knowledge holders (n = 10) who all participated in the oral history interviews. This group consisted of three women and seven men, all between the ages of 60 and 86. This age range was deliberately chosen, as older adults are more likely to hold lived memories of the cultural, social, and religious transformations that have shaped Indigenous Knowledge in Edendale. All oral history knowledge holders were long-term residents of Edendale. Knowledge holders 2, 4, 6, and 8 were direct descendants of the original African families who settled in the area in the 1850s, while others came from families that joined the community in later generations but still have knowledge of Edendale. Their long-standing residency ensured that each participant had multigenerational connections through lineage, marriage, or extended kinship networks, providing a rich foundation for reflecting on cultural memory and knowledge transmission.

The group also represented diversity in social roles. Among the ten knowledge holders, nine were recognised elders who had informally served as custodians of community memory; seven held faith-based positions, such as church leaders or active congregants; and eight were actively involved in cultural activities, oral traditions, or community history initiatives. Some individuals occupied multiple roles, reflecting the interconnected nature of cultural, religious, and historical responsibilities within the community. These overlapping roles also influenced their perspectives: for instance, those more closely allied with the Church tended to interpret changes in religious practices differently, while elders primarily focused on cultural traditions, emphasising continuity and adaptation of Indigenous Knowledge over time. Despite differences in their roles, all knowledge holders reflected on the significant cultural and religious changes that shaped how Indigenous Knowledge has been practised and transmitted in Edendale, drawing on intergenerational memories and personal experience.

For the Transect Walk and River of Life activities, participation included four of the original oral history interview knowledge holders (KH3, KH4, KH5, KH6) and an additional knowledge holder from the community who only participated in the Transect Walk and River of Life, together with five members of the research team who were also embedded in the Edendale community. This combination resulted in a total of 10 knowledge holders for these interactive exercises. The research team members contributed local knowledge, facilitated engagement, and supported cultural sensitivity, ensuring that the activities were conducted ethically and, in a manner, respectful of community norms. Their involvement also enhanced trust and provided additional perspectives, enriching the data generated through these methods.

7.4 Origins of Edendale: Reclaiming Indigenous Memory Against the “Empty Land” Myth

This theme examines how knowledge holders understand the beginnings of Edendale, revealing a tension between contrasting historical narratives. The dominant narrative from the data emphasises long-standing pre-colonial African sovereignty, governance, and cultural continuity, while a minority perspective, shaped by missionary records and later migration stories, obscures earlier African occupation. The theme reflects the community’s efforts to reclaim Indigenous memory and contest the colonial “empty land” myth. Across the data, there is a broad consensus rejecting the notion that Edendale was uninhabited prior to colonial intervention. Knowledge holders consistently emphasised the precolonial history of Edendale, dismantling the colonial fiction of empty land through oral histories of how the area was historically governed by African leaders, with structured political, social, and moral systems. Within the dataset, Machibisa is referenced by a single knowledge holder as a female ruler whose authority in the early nineteenth century encompassed Hilton, KwaMpumuza, the northern areas, and parts of Zwartkop. According to KH2, “around… possibly 1835, there was a woman… she was the King… She ruled this whole area before colonial chiefs and missionaries came. She could see everything if attackers came; her regiments could see and deploy. Why shouldn’t Maritzburg be called Machibisa instead of Mgungundlovu?” (Interview 2, 29 May 2025). KH4 presented a different story: “Edendale was never empty. It belonged to the Zondi chieftaincy. The land was organised, with headmen and designated farming areas” (Interview 2, 2 May 2025). Embedded in these structures were

social forums such as *imbizo* and *iyigcawu*, where knowledge was shared, disputes managed, and communal values reinforced.

During the Transect Walk (30 September 20025), KH4 emphasised, "*So when we speak of Eden, we are speaking of this place that was taken from the chiefs' lands… Onokesheni are the lands under the chiefs*". During the River of Life workshop (30 October 2025), the majority of knowledge holders present confirmed this. KH4 said, "*Yes. It was land owned by Black people at the time. They used to do farming*". Knowledge holders KH4, KH6, and KH8 in the River of Life workshop on the 30 October 2025 thus repudiated the legitimacy of the colonial grant to Andries Pretorius, pointing to the fact that the land was "awarded' by the British Crown as a by-product of military conquest. KH4 also recalled the presence of the Oorlams and the economic activities of the Khoi: "*Most of the Khois used to work at the factory at Hodges. They used to cut grass to sell to the city. They travelled in an ox wagon, pulling the grass until they reached town. Most of them occupied Edendale*". The research team added that: "Zulu communities were living on the land before it was given to Andries Pretorius… The Khoisan and San people, as the earliest inhabitants, were led by Matinwana. The Swazi people also occupied the land before being relocated… The place used to belong to the Nyuswa and San peoples. The Nyuswa were under the leadership of Macingwane". While these accounts converge in asserting African occupation prior to colonial intervention, they also reveal a multiplicity of narratives regarding which groups occupied the area, in what sequence, and under whose leadership. The data reflect overlapping and, at times, competing claims to belonging and authority, suggesting that the collective memory of the area's precolonial past is heterogeneous and contested.

According to the knowledge holders, material and architectural evidence also support pre-colonial occupation. During the River of Life workshop (30 October 2025), KH4 and the research team also confirmed the presence of round houses (*amaqhuqwana*), traditional African structures, and other physical evidence of sustained habitation before mission occupation: "*There was no square house here in Africa. There were round houses… The huts (amaqhuqwana) were here in Eden… built by the people here*". However, KH3 referred to a building with a date stone: "*If you look around Edendale, there is that old building with the stone. It has a date on it, 1774… it shows people were already living here long before colonial times*" (River of Life workshop, 30 October 2025). The building, locally associated with KwaPotolozi, is supposedly evidence of land use predating missionary settlement. However, while the knowledge holder cited the building's dating as evidence of early

occupation, the architectural form and the presence of a dated stone inscription raise questions about its likely origins. If the date is accurate, the building more plausibly reflects early European settler activity than African settlement. This account, therefore, illustrates the need for cautious interpretation of material markers and highlights how local memory, material remains, and historical attribution do not always align seamlessly.

During the Transect Walk exercise, KH4 also described customary burial practices associated with African cultural norms, noting: "*The cow's skin was used to wrap the body. There were no coffins then. This was the African way of burial, especially among Zulu people*". He also said, "The people who were buried are the people who were buried after the White people had come. Prior to that, people were being buried at homes. That was the African way of burying people". However, a minority of knowledge holders disputed claims that the area was settled before colonial occupation. KH6 stated: "*No, there were not any people before the missionaries. The first people came from Driefontein and settled here*" (Interview 2, 25 September 2025). Knowledge holders also acknowledged gaps in recorded history due to the prominence of missionary accounts. KH4 noted: "*History talks more about the missionaries; before that, I have not seen much written about Edendale*" (Interview 2, 2 May 2025).

In summary, the data suggest that the land later known as Edendale was occupied and governed by African communities long before colonial intervention. While there is strong consensus on pre-colonial presence, governance, and cultural continuity, minority perspectives shaped by migration histories and missionary narratives reveal a complex landscape of overlapping historical memories. These narratives collectively challenge residual colonial tropes that portrayed the area as underutilised or historically insignificant, and they underscore the importance of reclaiming Indigenous memory as a corrective to partial and selective historical representations.

7.5 African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS): Pedagogy, Moral Foundations, and Community Structure

As stated in Chapter One, one of the aims of this study was to theorise learning as a decolonial process; thus, understanding AIKS within Edendale and how these were re-inscribed/disrupted/replaced is an important aspect for exploration. This theme, therefore, presents AIKS as articulated through oral traditions and the lived knowledge of the Edendale

community. It foregrounds holistic systems of knowledge, ethics, and social organisation that structured everyday life in Edendale prior to, and alongside, the introduction of Western institutions. Rather than fragmented practices, AIKS emerge in the data as integrated pedagogical and moral frameworks through which learning, identity formation, and social regulation were collectively sustained.

The discussion traces AIKS as a coherent pedagogical system, beginning with structured mentorship and apprenticeship, through which children and youth were guided into socially recognised and often gendered pathways of becoming. It then examines the central role of orality, storytelling, and embodied learning as primary modes of knowledge transmission, where history, ethics, skills, and ecological understanding were taught through participation, narrative, and practice. The discussion further explores how these pedagogical processes were anchored in collective identity, social cohesion, and shared responsibility, with learning embedded in communal life and regulated through collective moral authority. The theme next examines spirituality and ancestral order as foundational organising principles within AIKS, highlighting how moral responsibility, ethical conduct, and social harmony were understood as spiritually grounded rather than individually negotiated. Finally, I consider Indigenous medicine and healing practices to be extensions of this holistic epistemology, framing well-being as a relational, integrated concept encompassing physical, spiritual, social, and ecological balance. Together, these interconnected dimensions demonstrate how, according to the knowledge holders, AIKS in Edendale functioned as a comprehensive moral and pedagogical universe that cultivated belonging, resilience, and continuity across generations.

7.5.1 Structured mentorship, apprenticeship, and gendered pathways of becoming

This sub-theme presents the reflections of knowledge holders on structured, age-based, and gendered mentorship and apprenticeship systems in Edendale. Across the narratives, there is a broad consensus that these systems were central to transmitting AIKS, instilling discipline, social responsibility, and cultural continuity. For girls, mentorship was primarily organised through the role of the *iqhikiza*, an older peer responsible for guiding younger girls through puberty, bodily changes, and socially acceptable behaviour. KH3 explained:

> Within a neighbourhood, you knew that if you were a young girl of a certain age, there was an older girl who looked after you. She would teach you how to tie your cloth, how to carry yourself when your body started to change, and what was appropriate or not. She

> was called an iqhikiza, and you were a young girl learning from her. You wouldn't want to be known as someone loose (Interview 2, 6 May 2025)

KH1 reinforced this, highlighting the role of the *iqhikiza* in teaching discipline, self-control, and dignity: *"An older girl guided younger girls in how to dress, behave respectfully, and avoid shameful conduct. She watched closely and corrected mistakes*" (Interview 2, 28 August 2025). For boys, mentorship was primarily linked to initiation schools (*entabeni*) and elder-led instruction shaping manhood, responsibility, and leadership. KH8 observed: "There was what you call *entabeni*… that's where boys were taught how to behave as men. It showed them how to respect others and how to run a household as the eldest person in the family" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025). KH7 added that initiation extended beyond circumcision: "*Older men taught young boys how to handle emotions, protect the family, and lead responsibly. The initiation period wasn't just circumcision; it was a full education about manhood*" (Interview 2, 26 May 2025). Across both genders, experiential and hands-on learning was central. Knowledge holders 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8 emphasised that observation, participation, and immersion within households and community spaces were key pedagogical strategies. KH1 explained:

> I grew up in a system where children learned by watching adults. No one sat you down with a textbook. If elders were fixing something, you watched. If they were planting, you watched. Then eventually, you did it yourself. That is how we learned farming, livestock care, respect, and responsibility. The environment was the school (Interview 2, 28 August 2025).

While this account highlights the endurance of Indigenous pedagogical practices grounded in observation, participation, and environmental immersion, it is important to situate it in its historical context. KH1, aged 65 at the time of the interview, must have been born around 1960, more than a century after Edendale was established as a mission station. The significance of this testimony, therefore, lies not in evidence of an unbroken pre-colonial system but in the persistence and adaptation of Indigenous modes of learning within a community long shaped by missionary education, colonial governance, and Western schooling. Read in this way, the account demonstrates how AIK practices continued to be reproduced at the household and communal levels, alongside, and sometimes in tension with, formal Western educational structures.

Girls learned domestic skills from grandmothers, as KH3 described: "*When I visited my grandmother, I was taught all the chores girls needed to know to run a household… People also taught each other how to brew, and at the same time, how to farm and plant*" (Interview 3, 28 August 2025). There was a shared consensus that these mentorship systems were disrupted by industrialisation and wage labour, particularly following the First World War. Notably, none of the participants personally experienced this historical moment, as they were born after these structural shifts had already taken root in Edendale. Their accounts, therefore, do not constitute eyewitness testimony but instead reflect the intergenerational transmission of community memory knowledge conveyed through elders, family histories, and communal narration. Within an Afrocentric epistemological framework, such transmitted memory is not treated as secondary or deficient but is recognised as a legitimate mode through which communities interpret foundational social ruptures and long-term transformations in Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

KH8 recalled that the emergence of factories and urban employment drew youth away from traditional mentorship structures: "*When the factories came, everything changed. The young boys were no longer staying with the men to learn. They were going to town, to work, to get money*" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025). In their second interviews, both KH1 (28 August 2025) and KH4 (Interview 2, 24 May 2025) similarly emphasised that wage labour weakened intergenerational knowledge transfer, disrupted moral instruction, and shifted conceptions of manhood from traditional skills to salary-earning capabilities. KH7 additionally noted that Western education sometimes promoted "white supremacist ways", further diminishing African cultural practices (Interview 3, 18 September 2025).

Despite these disruptions, the narratives collectively affirm the depth and intentionality of AIKS pedagogical systems. Structured mentorship, initiation-based guidance, and experiential learning were deliberate, relational strategies designed to cultivate socially grounded, disciplined, and culturally literate adults.

7.5.2 Orality, storytelling and embodied learning

This theme captures the central role of oral narrative, embodied participation, and communal structures in transmitting knowledge, moral values, and cultural identity in Edendale. This is significant to the study's overall argument because it demonstrates that AIKS in Edendale functioned as structured and resilient epistemic frameworks through which knowledge transmission, moral formation, and cultural continuity were sustained, despite prolonged

missionary influence, colonial governance, and the encroachment of Western knowledge systems. As can already be seen from the previous section, across the narratives, knowledge holders consistently emphasised that learning occurred relationally and experientially, with storytelling, song, daily work, and observation forming the primary curriculum for children long before formal schooling existed.

Storytelling (*izinganekwane*), particularly led by grandmothers, was a core pedagogical tool. KH3 explained: "*Stories usually had a moral… there is a message: 'Do not do this', or 'Do that'. Sometimes a lesson is instilled better through a story than by saying, 'Thou shalt not do ABC*" (Interview 3, 28 August 2025). Stories also reinforced family bonds and respect for elders. KH7 recalled that some stories served as warnings about real dangers: "*Some were scary… There were stories about cannibals. The lesson was: listen to your elders and life has dangers even when you are innocent*" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025). KH3 further noted that stories simultaneously entertained and instructed: "*These stories taught us not to walk at night, not to be stubborn, not to disrespect elders*" (Interview 3, 28 August 2025).

Storytelling was often embedded in musical and performative practices, expanding orality into embodied cultural expression. In his second interview (22 May 2025), but also during the Transect Walk and the River of Life workshop, KH8 highlighted the pedagogical significance of Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu (1900–1984), a Zulu princess, renowned composer, and custodian of royal oral traditions, emphasising that her songs functioned as teaching tools rather than mere artistic expression. Through performative expression, these songs conveyed "emotion, spirituality, and cultural history", illustrating how knowledge, values, and collective memory were transmitted within Indigenous pedagogical traditions (Interview 2, 22 May 2025).

Music for weddings, celebrations, and community events was remembered as a means of reinforcing communal values and cultural identity. Hands-on, experiential learning complemented oral instruction. KH3 (Interview 1, 6 May 2025) and KH7 (Interview 2, 6 May 2025) emphasised that children learned by watching adults in agriculture, brewing, cooking, and crafts. KH1 reflected: "*I learned how to make a fire, how to cook using a three-legged pot… all through direct guidance from my grandmother*" (Interview 2, 28 August 2025). KH6 confirmed the prevalence of imitation-based learning: "*We used to be copycats… copying the good things*", including beadwork and other cultural arts (Interview 3, 25 September 2025). The consensus is that embodied learning connected children to community rhythms, skills, and values, forming the foundation of moral and social competence.

The knowledge holders also consistently emphasised communal responsibility as integral to social cohesion and moral guidance. KH1 explained: "*An adult was an adult… we were afraid and could not just do anything in the presence of an adult*" (Interview 2, 28 August 2025). KH2 noted the multi-layered disciplinary system: "*You would not do anything wrong in front of your neighbour… they would discipline you, and you would not tell your parents, because your parents would also punish you so that you would be punished twice*" (Interview 1, 9 May 2025). KH3 summarised the communal ethos by quoting the well-known saying, "*It takes a village to raise a child*" (Interview 1, 6 May 2025). As discussed in the next section, economic and social cooperation likely further reinforced these communal structures. In particular, the raising of children – and, by extension, processes of teaching and learning - was understood as a collective responsibility rather than an individual- or household-bound task. Children were therefore instructed by, and learned from, the wider community, a dynamic that is examined in greater detail below.

While there is broad agreement on the effectiveness of these systems, many knowledge holders noted their erosion in contemporary life. KH3 observed: "*Family storytelling is now rare… youth spend their time on phones and television, making it difficult to recreate communal evenings around the fire*" (Interview 1, 6 May 2025). KH4 added: "*Young people now see oral stories as outdated, preferring televised narratives*" (Interview 1, 4 May 2025). Learning from watching or doing has also been eroded. KH2 explained: "*Technological and infrastructural changes have made daily life easier but removed many practical tasks that once served as instruction for children*" (Interview 1, 9 May 2025).

Collectively, these reflections point to a significant shift in the modes through which knowledge, values, and cultural identity are transmitted. While Indigenous pedagogical systems in Edendale were historically coherent, relational, and effective, their continuity is increasingly threatened by changing social conditions. Nevertheless, the persistence of these memories underscores both the depth of Indigenous educational practices and their continued relevance as epistemic resources for rethinking learning, socialisation, and community responsibility in the present.

7.5.3 Collective identity, social cohesion, and community responsibility

The data generated in this study suggest that AIKS in Edendale were grounded in a deeply communal social architecture, where identity, discipline, and daily survival were shared responsibilities. The community functioned as an extended family, with adults collectively

shaping children's moral development, neighbours sharing resources freely, and mutual care reinforcing a sense of belonging. This cohesion created an environment in which identity was rooted in pride, responsibility, and interdependence.

Across interviews, most knowledge holders affirmed that raising a child was considered a collective duty. Others linked this collective structure to pride and belonging. KH5 emphasised the role of elders in providing direct instruction and guiding children in respectful behaviour and daily conduct (Interview 1, 9 May 2025).

As discussed earlier, mutual support in Edendale extended across economic, social, and ritual life, reflected in practices such as *ukunana* and communal participation in celebrations, funerals, and daily assistance (KH6, Interview 2, 4 September 2025; KH7, River of Life Exercise, 30 October 2025). The physical layout of homesteads and open yards reinforced these bonds, facilitating collective responsibility and cooperation (KH5, Interview 1, 9 May 2025). While the historical strength of this communal structure is evident in the narratives above, knowledge holders expressed significant concern that these practices have been eroded by post-1994 mobility, changing disciplinary norms, and the adoption of individualist practices. The detailed contemporary manifestations of this communal fragmentation and the breakdown of intergenerational transmission are presented comprehensively in Section 7.7.

7.5.4 Spirituality, ancestral order and a moral responsibility

This theme highlights the centrality of spirituality and ancestral guidance within AIKS in Edendale, according to the study's data. Knowledge holders consistently emphasised that spiritual practices were embedded in daily life, social order, and identity, and that rituals and household ceremonies operationalised these moral and communal connections. Notably, these accounts are often presented in the present tense, suggesting that such practices are not merely historical but continue to shape daily life and communal relations in Edendale today.

Ancestors (*amadlozi*) were described as intermediaries between the living and the Supreme Creator (uNkulunkulu or Umvelinqangi). KH3 explained: “Once we slaughter a goat… we talk to *amadlozi*… we take what we are asking for because uNkulunkulu is above us; we cannot speak directly but do it via the ancestors” (Interview 3, 28 August 2025). KH1 stated: “That someone has died does not mean they no longer exist. That person continues to live and is still part of us… we can invoke our people who have passed who were good to us, our parents, and so on” (Oral History 1, 28 April 2025). KH3, KH4, KH6, and KH8 agreed with

this perspective during interviews (Interviews 2–3, April–May 2025), and the idea was further reinforced during the Transect Walk at the Methodist grave site (30 October 2025).

Rituals such as burning *impepho* (incense), slaughtering livestock, and preparing sacred food containers (*uMamsamo*) were described as mechanisms for moral and social accountability. (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). During the Transect Walk (30 October 2025), KH3 elaborated: "You slaughter, say 'I remember you', people eat, dance, drink *umqombothi*, light candles, burn *impepho*, and tell that person you remember them. The sacred food container, *uMamsamo*, holds African foods until the celebration is over". Knowledge holders emphasised the coexistence of Indigenous practices with Christianity. KH3 noted: "Even though we went to church, incense was burned, slaughtering was done, everything was practised… it was not a problem" (Interview 3, 28 August 2025).

KH7 reflected: "*My grandfather was religious, but he still honoured the ancestors…so Black people…do both concurrently*" (Interview 3, 18 September). Gendered ritual protocols were also observed. KH3 explained: "No woman can burn *impepho*… but when the man is gone, a woman can do it" (Interview 3, 28 Aug 2025). Collectively, these accounts show that spirituality and ancestral guidance were foundational to AIKS. They structured moral conduct, reinforced household and community order, and sustained intergenerational identity. Even with the introduction of Christianity and urbanisation, the narratives of knowledge holders demonstrate the persistence of hybrid practices, reflecting the adaptability and resilience of Indigenous spiritual and moral frameworks.

7.5.5 Indigenous medicine, healing practices, and holistic wellness

This sub-theme focuses on the perspectives of knowledge holders on health, healing, and holistic wellness as embedded within AIKS in Edendale. It explores how wellness was understood as a balance between the body, mind, community, and spiritual realms, and how knowledge of herbal remedies, ritual practices, diet, and lifestyle habits structured Indigenous approaches to health.

Some knowledge holders emphasised the role of herbal medicine in treating common ailments. KH7 explained: "*Traditionally…if I am getting flu, I know which herbs to use to heal myself. For flu, we had iboza, umhlonyane…they were key herbs for treating flu*" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025). KH8, in his second oral history interview, described the preparation and administration of medicinal plants: "*I'll buy them, mix, boil, and drink; it will*

end the sickness" (22 May 2025). These accounts highlight how herbal knowledge was transmitted orally and through practice, and how it remains part of current life.

One participant also described diet and lifestyle as central to wellness. KH4 explained: "*Even when there was no salt, we still ate and were satisfied. That is why we were healthy. But today's children do not want traditional food; they want chips*" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). Many of the knowledge holders noted that health was linked not only to the absence of illness but to maintaining balance and harmony within the body and with the environment. Spiritual and ritual practices complemented herbal medicine. Knowledge holders 3, 4, 7, and 8 reflected on the role of traditional healers and family elders in diagnosing and addressing ailments, invoking ancestors' guidance to ensure both physical and spiritual well-being. Knowledge holders also highlighted that Westernisation, urbanisation, and formal education have disrupted the transmission of these practices. For example, KH8 recalled that "*During COVID, umhlonyane and umsuzwane helped with flu or when bathing children; it helped us, but we were brainwashed to believe otherwise*" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025).

Knowledge holders 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8 emphasised that younger generations often lack exposure to herbal knowledge and holistic healing practices, while societal preference for modern medicine has marginalised traditional approaches. Collectively, these narratives illustrate that Indigenous wellness systems in Edendale reflect a sophisticated, culturally grounded approach to health that integrates empirical knowledge, ritual, diet, and spirituality. According to the data, AIKS positioned health as a collective and relational responsibility, linking individual well-being with moral, social, and spiritual accountability. Despite the pressures of modernity, the accounts of knowledge holders reveal the resilience and ongoing relevance of these practices within the community.

7.6 Colonial/Western Institutional Penetration and the Reordering of African Life and Knowledge

This section examines how colonial and Western institutions, including missionary activity, formal schooling, land administration, wage labour, and Western medicine, penetrated Edendale and reshaped social organisation, spiritual life, pedagogy, authority structures, and relationships to land. As evidenced by the data presented in the preceding sections, many beliefs, values, and practices continue to be upheld by knowledge holders. Yet, there is also widespread concern about their erosion. By documenting community recollections, this

section highlights both the resilience and the transformation of AIKS under these institutional pressures, illustrating how everyday life, knowledge transmission, and communal structures were reordered in response to colonial and Western influences.

7.6.1 Land, naming, and the erasure of African sovereignty

As discussed in Section 7.4, knowledge holders emphasised that the area now known as Edendale was politically and socially organised prior to colonial arrival. They identified the Zondi clan as the original custodians of the land and recalled that authority was exercised through established local structures, including female leadership in some cases. The transfer of land into colonial control was consistently described as a consequence of military conquest, and the renaming of the area as Edendale was attributed to missionary influence. This data underscores the continuity of communal organisation and authority prior to colonial intervention, providing important context for understanding the subsequent reordering of social and knowledge systems under colonial and Western institutions.

As discussed in Chapters Three and Six, from 1861 onward, individual title deeds were issued, and knowledge holders were clearly aware of this. KH3 noted: "*In Edendale, you could get a full title for a small plot*" (Interview 3, 28 August). However, according to this knowledge holder, this system differed from prior arrangements: "*This title system was not our system… it changed how people thought about land – now it was not community land, it was individual land*" (KH4 2, 24 May).

KH3 echoed: "*It changed how people thought about land. It was no longer community land*" (Interview 2, 26 May 2025). These reflections suggest a critical awareness among knowledge holders of how colonial land policies undermined communal ownership and reshaped social relations, marking a significant departure from pre-colonial arrangements.

Despite such institutional changes, some traditional practices continued. As noted in previous sections, practices such as home burials and the construction of round huts (*amaqhuqwana*) persisted alongside Western-style houses, indicating the selective continuity of cultural practices. However, it is important to emphasise that the focus here is on the broader transformation of social and property relations, rather than on individual examples of persistence, which have been discussed in detail in earlier sections.

7.6.2 The missionary-school complex: Religion, pedagogy, and everyday life

Knowledge holders consistently described the mission church and school as co-located and functionally linked. KH4 stated: "The school was not only a school. It was also a church" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). Transect Walk records note: "*In Edendale, the church is the very first building they constructed when they arrived here… a mission included a church, a school*" (KH4, Transect Walk Record, September 30, 2025). This is a clear indication of the church's educative function. This evidently operated at different levels and in different ways.

One obvious way in which the mission church sought to change people's views was by disapproving of traditional customs and practices. According to the knowledge holders, conversion to Christianity was often associated with the abandonment of Indigenous customs. KH5 recalled: "*Yes, customs were abandoned… when you joined the church, you dropped the custom*" (Interview 2, 24 September). According to this knowledge holder, those who maintained traditional practices were sometimes called "heathens" (Interview 2, 24 September). For example, traditional dress was discouraged in church. KH4 said, "*You would never enter a church wearing your traditional attire*" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). KH4 added: "*You no longer wear the skins… you put aside what you had known*" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). KH2 suggested that getting people to abandon traditional customs and practices was not simply done through persuasion but was ultimately quite violent: "*They burned some of our medicines and forced us to abandon our African ways of doing things*" (Interview 2, 29 May 2025). I discuss this further in the next section.

According to the data, not only traditional customs and practices at the household level were affected; traditional structures and forms of social rule were as well. For example, KH1 remembered missionaries instructing converts: "*There is only one king [God], forget about other kings*" (Interview 2, 28 August 2025). However, as the previous discussion already makes clear, despite Church pressure, many households practised both Christianity and ancestral rituals rather than wholly abandoning traditional beliefs and practices. KH7 stated: "*Black people… do both concurrently*" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025). KH1 described families that "*attended church while continuing ancestral observances*" (Interview 2, 28 August 2025). KH8 observed: "*Many Wesleyans and Catholics… continue as before… they do both*" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025). KH9 remarked: "*It is not easy to get rid of our rituals and culture*" (Interview 1, 4 May 2025).

As I have suggested at the start of this section, the school played an important role in the overall process. Although none of the knowledge holders had any experience of the original mission school, the schooling they did receive (at the same mission school, albeit many decades later) was remembered as highly disciplined. KH2 recalled: "*They made us sit in straight lines, march in straight lines, speak in straight lines*" (Interview 2, 9 May). KH4 noted rules about appearance: "*Tuck in our shirts, shine our shoes, cut our hair short… even how the body must appear*" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). He added: "*Even how you looked at elders was controlled… they taught us their discipline, not ours*"

Language policy featured prominently in recollections. KH1 was punished for speaking isiZulu: "*They said, 'Speak English only'. Imagine being punished for speaking your own mother tongue*" (Interview 2, 28 August 2025). KH4 observed: "*The moment you could speak English, they said you were better than others*" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). English speakers were referred to as *izifundiswa*, and Edendale was described as becoming "*an English-speaking society*" (KH4 Interview 2, 24 May 2025). Religious instruction in schools framed ancestral practices negatively. KH3 recalled being taught that "*The ancestors are demons*" (Interview 1, 6 May 2025). KH1 noted that "*Christianity took families by storm*" through churches and schools (Interview 2, 28 August 2025). Some knowledge holders reported alignment between home and school values. KH5 said: "*There was never a time when school said I was wrong and my family disagreed*" (Interview 2, 9 May 2025); and KH2 noted that some teachers "*were community members who understood local customs*" (Interview 2, 9 May). KH8 described school as "*an extension of family teachings*", especially regarding hygiene and conduct (Interview 2, 28 May 2025). The profound psychological and identity-related consequences of this linguistic and cultural suppression, including the contemporary loss of African identity, mental colonisation, and the erosion of intergenerational respect, are consolidated in Section 7.7.

7.6.3 Missionary and colonial reordering of land and authority

Knowledge holders linked colonial and missionary control. KH5 explained that Chief Minnie "*was appointed by the provincial government, not by the King of the Zulus*" (Interview 2, 9 May). KH2, in her second interview, further said that such leaders "lacked the legitimacy of traditional figures like Chief Zondi," and that while izinduna continued to perform some roles, their power was limited by colonial officials. KH4 referred to Chief Minnie as the "*Chief of Amakholwa Tribe*", indicating how Christian identity shaped political categorisation

(Interview 2, 24 May 2025). Thus, clearly, the knowledge holders believe that customary authority was constrained. This impacted those living in Edendale in many ways, including at a personal level. KH3 noted that "customary unions had to be registered through the colonial magistrate" (Interview 3, 28, August).

As discussed above, the knowledge holders recognised that land shifted from community control to individual private property, which they see as having further eroded traditional practices and how people view land. The land was subdivided into regulated plots. During the River of Life session (30 September 2025), KH3, KH4, and KH5 explained that the original farm "*no longer remained one farm*" but was split into Blocks A, B, and others to settle debts, including payments to surveyor Buchanan. According to knowledge holders, some families engaged strategically with colonial systems. In interviews, KH3 noted that individual title deeds attracted settlers seeking secure land access (Interview 3, 28 August). During the River of Life workshop (30 October 2025), KH3 and KH4 recalled that early residents farmed extensively and used land ownership to remain economically independent from colonial employers.

Under the apartheid regime, a period within the living memory of the knowledge holders, demographic shifts occurred. KH6 recalled: "*Indian and Coloured families were forcibly removed to suburbs such as Northdale and Woodlands*" in the 1950s, after which Edendale was designated a Black residential area (Interview 2, 9 May 2025). Administrative labels were sometimes rejected, particularly those related to exactly what constituted 'Edendale'. During the River of Life workshop (30 September 2025), older residents stated that the name "Greater Edendale" is unfamiliar. In the workshop, KH4 insisted that "*Imbali was never part of Edendale*", despite being grouped under this name in later municipal planning.

7.6.4 Industrialisation, wage labour, and the erosion of traditional economic and mentorship structures

This sub-theme focuses on the views of knowledge holders regarding how industrialisation reshaped Edendale's economic life, social rhythms, and Indigenous mentorship structures. Across the oral history interviews, Transect Walk, and River of Life data generation, knowledge holder narratives describe a transition from an agrarian, land-based economy rooted in intergenerational guidance to a wage-labour system structured around factories, timetables, and monetary income. While these accounts emphasise the disruptions caused by factory work and the restructuring of social and economic relations, it is important to

recognise that many original settlers did not enter wage labour alone: some accumulated significant wealth through land ownership, trade, and other entrepreneurial activities. This highlights that the impact of industrialisation was uneven and that Indigenous economic strategies adapted in diverse ways to the emerging colonial-capitalist context. While most knowledge holders reflected on the disruptive consequences of industrialisation for mentorship and communal cohesion, a smaller number highlighted how the new economy reduced certain physical hardships and introduced alternative youth-oriented structures.

Knowledge holders described pre-industrial Edendale as a community in which economic activity and mentorship were deeply intertwined. Farming, cattle herding, and homestead responsibilities created daily opportunities for structured guidance from elders. Mentorship systems such as *iqhikiza* for girls and *induna*-guided instruction for boys, as discussed earlier, depended on shared time, proximity, and constant interaction within homesteads and communal spaces.

During oral history data generation, KH1 reflected on early resistance to wage labour, explaining that "African people initially refused to do that work (planting sugar cane) because they used to have cows and goats and could not leave them. He further noted that "*colonial laws were later enacted… limiting cattle ownership… to force people to work*" (Interview 1, 28 April). This account situates industrialisation within a broader process of engineered economic dependency in which African self-sufficiency was deliberately weakened.

According to the knowledge holders, as industrial centres expanded, for many of the community, factories replaced fields as primary sources of livelihood, reshaping daily rhythms and social organisation. As previously discussed, KH4 and KH8 emphasised that industrialisation disrupted intergenerational knowledge transmission by weakening mentorship structures historically embedded within homesteads, cattle posts, and communal labour. Wage labour, they explained, interrupted the intimate relationship between land-based work, masculine socialisation, and community teaching. In an oral history interview, KH8 highlighted the rise of industrial sites such as the Plessislaer and Georgetown tanneries, noting that while factory employment provided monetary income, it eroded the ritual and temporal rhythms that sustained communal cohesion. He emphasised the educational centrality of livestock, stating that "cattle were school. Cattle were university. Cattle taught boys everything, but when cattle disappeared, the teachings disappeared" (Interview 2, 22 May).

KH7 expanded on this view by describing how industrialisation transformed identity and social organisation. He explained that "Edendale people were initially not workers; they were farmers… After industry, the idea of a man changed: a man was someone who worked for a salary" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025). He added that "the knowledge of becoming a man through our own ways went down", linking wage labour to the erosion of Indigenous pathways to adulthood. He further observed that "industrialisation taught us individualism… We never locked doors before", noting that under the new system "the employer had more power than the chief" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025). Similar reflections were shared by KH1 on 6 May 2025, KH4 on 25 September 2025, KH6 on 24 May 2025, and KH8 on 26 May 2025, all of whom noted that traditional authority weakened as economic power shifted away from communal leadership structures.

These accounts highlight that colonial interventions clearly disrupted traditional authority; knowledge holders emphasised that internal economic transformations, particularly the rise of wage labour and industrial capitalism, also undermined communal power structures and Indigenous pathways for socialisation and adulthood. In other words, the weakening of authority in Edendale was not solely a product of external colonial imposition but was also shaped by broader socio-economic changes that redefined labour, gender roles, and community hierarchies. This observation suggests that Indigenous social systems were navigating multiple, overlapping pressures, producing both continuity in some practices and transformation in others.

While the disruption of mentorship structures is noted here, the knowledge holders' detailed reflections on how the subsequent collapse of institutions like the YMCA contributed to contemporary youth moral decline, substance abuse, and social decay are consolidated and presented comprehensively in Section 7.7.3. Knowledge holders also reflected on how industrialisation altered women's economic roles and household knowledge systems. During the River of Life workshop (30 September 2025), KH5 explained that "*industry brought a new timetable: Monday to Friday, eight to five. So, the old timetable was broken*". She added that "*as the place became industrial, people forgot their gardens, their chickens, their small farms*", highlighting the displacement of homestead-based production by shop-bought food and the resulting loss of planting, storing, and harvesting knowledge.

While loss dominated knowledge-holder narratives, some acknowledged the limited benefits of industrialisation. KH6 recalled the physical demands of pre-industrial life, noting that "*children had lots of chores before going to school… herding, taking care of livestock,*

fetching water". He observed that "*the presence of taps and electricity meant life is easier*", suggesting that although mentorship declined, certain burdens of daily life were reduced (Interview 1, 9 May 2025). KH6's reflection introduces an important nuance into the narratives of erosion and loss, pointing to an ambivalent experience of change, in which improvements in material conditions coexist with the weakening of intergenerational guidance and Indigenous learning practices.

Taken together, knowledge holder narratives indicate that the transition from agrarian independence to industrial wage labour reshaped Edendale's economic and social foundations. This shift is frequently described as replacing a sun- and season-regulated communal rhythm with the discipline of factory time. While monetary income increased and certain physical hardships were alleviated, industrialisation is widely remembered for disrupting slow, relational, intergenerational mentorship systems that had sustained communal life. However, this trajectory was not uniform. For many original settler families, industrialisation did not result in economic decline but coincided with the accumulation of land-based, commercial, and professional wealth. The dominant memory of fragmentation and loss, therefore, reflects particular social experiences within the community, underscoring that industrialisation produced differentiated outcomes rather than a singular, linear transformation. The subsequent socio-cultural fallout of this institutional disruption, particularly the moral challenges facing Edendale's youth, substance abuse, and the collapse of structured mentorship programmes like the YMCA, is presented in detail in Section 7.7.

7.6.5 Biomedicine and the marginalisation of indigenous healing epistemologies

This sub-theme focuses on knowledge holder perspectives regarding the introduction of Western healthcare systems, including clinics and hospitals, and their effects on Indigenous medicinal knowledge in Edendale. Across oral history, Transect Walk, and River of Life data generation, knowledge holders described Western medicine as a dominant system that sidelined African healing practices, contributed to their delegitimisation, and disrupted the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. As KH7 explained: "*We were affected in a way that some of our medicines were burned and we were forced to abandon our African ways of doing things in the name of we are now amakholwa, so we cannot visit sangomas or use African medicines*" (Interview 3, 5 September 2025). KH8 observed that children "*were brainwashed to believe otherwise*" regarding traditional herbs, which were portrayed as "dirty

or unsafe", lamenting that "*children today do not know the names of the herbs*" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025). KH3 noted the systematic removal of traditional remedies: "*Some medicines we used to find in chemists (pharmacies) are no longer there. They worked, but they were banned. That is how our knowledge was removed*" (Interview 3, 24 September 2025). She further reflected that young people often dismiss Indigenous medicine as superstition, a perception reinforced by Western education and urbanisation. KH4 added that confidence in African medicine has declined: "*Now we do not have that knowledge anymore and beyond that, we do not trust it… We do not trust African ways because the continuity was broken*" (Interview 2, 9 May 2025).

Knowledge holders also highlighted the generational loss of practical knowledge. KH6 described the disappearance of home-based remedies, explaining: "*We lost that knowledge that elders had… like when you have a tummy ache, you take peach-tree leaves, grind them, mix with water, and drink. We do not have that anymore*" (Interview 1, 6 May 2025). He added that kitchens no longer function as learning spaces, so children "*do not know the names and the recipes*". KH7 listed lost herbs, including *iboza* and *umhlonyane* (African wormwood), noting that they were "*key herbs in treating a flu" and that "the young people do not know about umhlonyane, their medicinal role, how it is*" (Interview 3, 5 September 2025). KH6 further linked the abandonment of traditional foods and herbs to health outcomes, noting that children increasingly reject traditional foods in favour of processed alternatives. During their oral history interview, KH3, KH4, KH6, KH7, and KH8 explained that traditional healing depended on specific environmental resources, such as trees, roots, and rivers, which have diminished with land development, making Indigenous medicine harder to sustain. KH1 highlighted procedural differences with Western medicine:

> In our African way, you must abstain from sex in order to use these medicines… some require their users to wake up before others do; no measurements are used. In contrast, Western medicine uses measurements like spoons or teaspoons after meals. (Interview 1, 6 May 2025)

Despite these pressures, knowledge holders described the resilience and continued relevance of African healing practices. KH7 highlighted coexistence with Western medicine, stating: "*There came a time when both were used together… We have gained cooperation – we have learned that both help heal*", emphasising that Indigenous medicine is "still valid" (Interview 3, 5 September 2025). He recalled that during COVID-19, traditional herbs such as *umhlonyane* and *umsuzwane* were actively used and effective. KH3 affirmed: "*No, we did not*

move away from traditional medicine, even today, there are people who still practice" (Interview 3, 24 September 2025). She noted that economic constraints often necessitate reliance on Indigenous remedies. KH7 validated African medicine as a scientific system: "*African medication is not science, it is also science… Our only thing is that it is not via a laboratory, but it is also science*", noting that its application follows specific rules, including ritual and moral considerations (Interview 3, 18 September)

Knowledge holders also recalled the establishment of Western medical institutions, which entrenched their dominance. KH3, KH4, and KH7, in their second stage of interviews, noted that early mission structures often combined clinics with educational and religious functions, reflecting a hybrid but ultimately Western-dominated approach to health. Clinics were initially located near huts but later moved to Caluza (now Caluza Clinic), and Edendale Hospital was constructed in 1956. KH4 suggested the potential for integration, stressing collaboration between systems while raising concerns about the authenticity of training for young traditional healers due to commercialisation (Interview 2, 9 May 2025).

The marginalisation of Indigenous healing can be likened to replacing a locally adapted herbal handbook with a standardised Western pharmacology textbook: the handbook was effective, locally sourced, and environmentally adapted, but its loss, coupled with breaks in oral transmission, left younger generations unaware of herb names, uses, and preparations, rendering them reliant on costly, standardised Western alternatives.

7.7 Socio-Cultural Fragmentation and the Crisis of Individualism

This theme explores what knowledge holders consider to be the social and cultural consequences of the gradual breakdown of Indigenous structures in Edendale, and the deep effects of adopting Western individualist values. Knowledge holders' reflections indicate that they believe the erosion of communal norms, collective responsibility, and shared moral authority has led to fragmentation in family life, weakened social ties, and a growing disconnect between generations. The theme highlights how, according to the knowledge holders, these shifts have not only disrupted traditional ways of raising children and maintaining social order but have also affected identity, belonging, and community resilience.

Within this theme, several sub-themes are examined: the breakdown of collective responsibility and the rise of individualism; the erosion of intergenerational respect; social

decay expressed through substance abuse and crime; and the loss of African identity alongside mental colonisation. Together, these sub-themes illuminate the multiple layers of socio-cultural disruption, showing how the community's moral and social fabric has been challenged, and the ongoing struggle to sustain Indigenous values in the face of modern pressures. As indicated in the preceding sections, the historical and institutional shifts described by the knowledge holders produced cascading socio-cultural consequences. Rather than presenting these outcomes as isolated observations scattered throughout the data, this section consolidates the knowledge holders' reflections on the interconnected crises of communal fragmentation, the erosion of intergenerational respect, youth moral decline, language loss, and the loss of African identity. The narratives reveal that the knowledge holders perceive these themes as deeply entangled: the breakdown of collective child-rearing (Section 7.7.1) directly fuels the erosion of elder authority (Section 7.7.2) and youth social decay (Section 7.7.3), culminating in what participants describe as a profound loss of cultural identity and mental colonisation (Section 7.7.4).

7.7.1 Breakdown of traditional customs and beliefs

This sub-theme examines the perspectives of knowledge holders on the sociological transformations in Edendale, focusing on the erosion of communal responsibility and traditional child-rearing practices under the pressures of Western individualism. As I discussed earlier in the chapter (see sections 7.5.2 and 7.5.3), historically, the community's ethic of shared upbringing, summarised in the proverb "*it takes a village to raise a child*,, channelled youthful energy, reinforced social cohesion, and maintained intergenerational authority. Across data generation, knowledge holders consistently linked the decline of collective responsibility to social challenges, including crime, substance abuse, and general disrespect. KH3 reflected on the strength of communal child-rearing: "*The African proverb, 'it takes a community to raise a child', was a reality. However, this is no longer practised, as a mother today would refuse an adult's discipline of her child by asking, 'Who gave you permission (laughter) for you to beat my child?*" (Interview 3, 24 September 2025). She noted that government bans on corporal punishment complicated the return to traditional disciplinary approaches.

KH4 reinforced this view:

> In the past, a child would not do anything wrong in front of their neighbour just because their mother was not there. If an elder disciplined a child, the parents would also punish

them, meaning the child would be punished twice. Today, that sense of community is no longer there. (Interview 2, 9 May 2025)

KH8, in the second interview, explained the breakdown of communal oversight: "*Communities have disintegrated. This thing about a child being brought up by a community… we have ended up with situations where it is my child, you do not interfere with my child. Children do not even know who you are*" (22 May 2025). Similarly, KH4 remarked: "*Education without respect is useless. Children just run wild. They talk back. They say, 'We are educated'. They no longer follow these customs*" (Interview 2, 9 May 2025). KH5 observed:

> That sense of pride is gone. The community has adopted an 'everyone for themselves' attitude. If an elder says something to a child, the child may argue back, 'Why are you interfering?' because they were not raised to fear elders. (Interview 2, 28 August 2025)

KH6 directly linked communal upbringing to identity preservation:

> Because your identity is important, you know your roots and can teach young ones things like Izithakazelo and how to work together as a community. Remember, it takes a village to raise a child. In my day, children who were doing wrong in the streets were beaten by any adult who saw them doing wrong in the streets. (Interview 2, 4 September 2025)

Many knowledge holders understand the erosion of collective authority as having caused rising social challenges. KH4 described the consequences: "*When the African structure and even the YMCA within the Christian frame was destroyed, things changed, and this damaged us, I will not lie. The youth today are out of control, drinking a lot of liquor*" (Interview 2, 9 May 2025). He linked these shifts to moral decay: "*The ancestors forgot that in our culture, stealing was a curse*".

KH3 recalled a tragic incident: "*Lack of respect and drug use are major challenges currently faced by the youth… students hijacked a school bus while intoxicated, resulting in the death of a scholar… destroying our communities basically*" (Interview 3, 24 September 2025). KH5 added: "*There are a lot of drugs, substance abuse, and many dirty kids in the streets. The problem has gone too far. There is nothing that can help. It is flowing in their blood*" (Interview 3, 24 September 2025). KH4 also highlighted the lack of respect and sexual violence as a consequence of liquor: "*I do not know whether they can learn anything, because they are drinking too much. Drugs and liquor are the order of the day*" (Interview 2, 9 May 2025).

Despite the concerns about education discussed above (see section 7.5.2), KH7 emphasised the protective role of education: "*If you did not go to school, you would become a thug, robbing people at night, breaking into houses*" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025). This framing positions formal schooling as a pathway to employment, and as a contemporary moral safeguard in a context where Indigenous mentorship structures have weakened. Notably, this view reflects a pragmatic re-evaluation of Western education: while earlier sections documented its role in cultural displacement, here schooling is rearticulated as a necessary substitute for eroded communal systems of discipline and guidance, rather than an unproblematic or ideal form of moral formation.

Knowledge holders consistently highlighted the YMCA's central role in mediating these social changes. KH4, during the Transect Walk (30 September 2025), noted: "*The YMCA guided the old Georgetown we grew up in… We all grew up under that guidance. The YMCA kept youth occupied and to avoid using substances*". He recounted structured activities such as boxing, karate, table tennis, and ballroom dancing, as well as personal memories like meeting his wife at a ballroom dance. KH1 corroborated: "*Most of the youth were trained in sports and athletics, boxing and football. The centre was supported by headquarters in Sweden and by wealthy [local white liberal] individuals like Mr Peter Brown*" (Interview 1, 6 May 2025). KH3 emphasised the need to revive structured youth programmes: "*What is missing is structure… The YMCA was central in instilling values. Sports should be reintroduced in schools to uncover the talent of youth who are now in the streets, playing with drugs*" (Interview 3, 24 September 2025). According to the knowledge holders, the breakdown of collective traditional customs and beliefs extended beyond youth discipline to family structure and land management. KH4, during the Transect Walk (30 September 2025), explained: "*As people developed and became better, they no longer followed the old style of having wives in one yard. They began to separate them. The wives had jealousy; they no longer wanted to live together*". According to him, generational breakdown was evident: "*The sons of Daniel Msimang no longer lived together as a family. They separated into other towns like Mahikeng, and others went to Transkei*". Family conflict persisted: "*There are many Msimangs in the Transkei, although they do not like each other*". Land ownership shifted from communal stewardship toward commodification and accumulation. According to KH4, "*African families holding large plots began to sell to other people so that we could reach the level of getting money*". This account does not suggest economic survival or distress, but rather a deliberate engagement with land as a source of wealth. For many

original settler families, freehold land enabled significant accumulation through subdivision, sale at premium prices, or rental to multiple households. In this sense, land was increasingly repositioned as an asset within a market economy, marking a clear departure from earlier relational understandings of land as collectively held and socially embedded.

Overall, knowledge holders argued that these factors, combined with the dismantling of eroded collective responsibility, increased youth disrespect and substance abuse, and fragmented families and land tenure, have contributed to the erosion of communal cohesion and moral accountability in Edendale. These narratives reveal the profound sociological effects of industrialisation, urbanisation, and colonial-modern reforms on Edendale's social fabric.

7.7.2 Erosion of intergenerational respect

As already discussed, the data generation reveals an evident erosion of intergenerational respect in Edendale, attributed mainly to the perceived superiority of Western education, science, and technology. Knowledge holders consistently described younger, Western-educated generations as viewing elder wisdom as outdated or irrelevant, generating tension within households and communities. A central idea emerging across the data is that academic achievement and technological proficiency have fostered a sense of intellectual superiority among young people, leading to a disregard for elders and traditional knowledge. KH8 observed:

> Children just run wild. They talk back. They say, 'We are educated'. Education without respect is useless… But today's children, who are educated, no longer know these things (traditional customs). The community is damaged because we abandoned our education and replaced it with Western education. Now people don't respect. (Interview 2, 22 May 2025

KH4 emphasised technology's role:

> These days children look down upon the elders. They say that the elders don't know anything. With this technology, we no longer know anything; it's them who now know more than us… When you don't seek advice from the elders, it's gone. (Interview 2, 24 May 2025)

KH5 reflected on the generational gap in technological skill:

> Today's youth are more advanced than us in many things. I am taught how to use a cell phone by children and better than us in a lot of things. But the youth is lost – lost in how to behave, who they are, and what the rules are. (Interview 2, 9 May 2025)

According to knowledge holders, technology has impacted on how children feel about traditional modes of transmitting knowledge. KH4 observed that exposure to social media and other technology has caused children to view traditional storytelling as "outdated" and "a waste of time", diminishing their interest in ancestral knowledge (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). KH3 noted how schooling shifted authority from traditional structures to Western institutions: "*The young boys who went to school stopped listening to the induna. They said the induna is old-fashioned. They said the schoolteacher knows better*" (Stage 3, 24 September 2025). She added that children speaking English embarrassed elders who could not, which "took away the dignity of the elders".

Other knowledge holders framed disrespect within broader historical and systemic factors. KH3 (Interview 3, 24 September 2025), KH4 (Interview 2, 24 May 2025), and KH8 (Interview 2, 22 May 2025) highlighted the breakdown of communal authority: KH3 explained, "*Communities have sort of disintegrated… it's my child, you don't interfere with my child… just don't even know who you are, kind of thing*". She contrasted this with past practices: "*When we grew up an adult was an adult… we were afraid and couldn't just do anyhow in the presence of an adult*".

KH7 located the issue within colonial influence, stating that Western education "*colonised our minds… children are more Eurocentric, thinking like whites, and their culture and respect disappear when taught white supremacist ways*" (Interview 2, 26 May 2025). KH2 (Interview 2/3, 10 September 2025), KH3 (Interview 3, 24 September 2025), KH4 (Interview 2, 24 May 2025), KH7 (Interview 2, 26 May 2025), and KH8 (Interview 2, 22 May 2025) noted that respect historically extended to Western knowledge, with KH3 explaining, "*Learning made us respect the whites. We respect whites because they came with science and we didn't know about science*". KH7 further highlighted the erosion of authority within schools, where corporal punishment was removed and parents openly challenged teachers, further undermining respect (Interview 2, 26 May 2025)

This phenomenon can be metaphorically understood as giving a child a calculator while discarding the abacus: proficiency in the new, faster method (Western knowledge and technology) makes the older method, representing traditional wisdom and cultural pedagogy,

seem irrelevant. The perceived intellectual gap results in the dismissal of the preceding generation as obsolete.

7.7.3 Social decay: Moral challenges facing Edendale youth

As discussed in section 7.7.1, knowledge holders highlighted substance abuse as a key factor disrupting youth behaviour and undermining communal discipline. KH4, in the second oral history interview (9 May 2025), emphasised the severity of the crisis: "*The youth today are out of control. One cannot imagine murder being so casual… Who would rape a 6-month-old baby? Who would kill a child?*". He noted that liquor and theft are rampant: "*People steal openly and nothing happens*". He contrasted this with youth raised under the YMCA and African homes, who "still hold on to those values and cannot do these things". KH5 also referred to an ongoing issue of crime, recalling peers who engaged in criminal behaviour:

> Those of my age who chose to start stealing breads from Bhayas ended up being arrested and grew up in jail, subsequently dying one after another… A friend who went to Durban to hijack and pickpocket people was arrested and became an old man before his time to be. (Interview 3, 28 August 2025)

KH7 highlighted drugs as a major challenge, recounting the incident of the bus being highjacked by school pupils: "*Students demanded the bus driver take them to a shebeen to buy more liquor… This friction led to fighting, and they ended up killing a scholar. This kind of behaviour is destroying our communities basically*" (Interview 3, 5 September 2025). He added that the youth demonstrate a "lack of respect" and engage in "substances which is irresponsible for this kind of behaviour". KH5 said, "*They are drinking too much. Drugs and liquor are the order of the day. Youth have money every day to buy liquor*". She further stressed that the breakdown in respect has severe consequences, with men not respecting women, leading to instances of rape (Interview 3, 24 September 2025). As discussed earlier, KH3 also noted the pervasive nature of substance abuse (Interview 3, 5 September 2025).

Knowledge holders thus observed that drug and alcohol use among young people in Edendale is widespread, profoundly affecting behaviour, community safety, and the transmission of moral and social values. KH4, as discussed earlier, stressed the connection between lack of education and antisocial behaviour (Interview 2, 9 May 2025), framing schooling as a protective mechanism against theft, robbery, and delinquency. KH5 added nuance by recalling peers whose involvement in crime led to early incarceration and premature death, illustrating the tangible consequences of educational absence. However, these accounts must

be read critically considering earlier findings: formal schooling, particularly under colonial and missionary systems, often displaced Indigenous pedagogical practices, weakened intergenerational mentorship, and eroded respect for elders. The apparent contradiction – schools as both protective and culturally disruptive, highlights the ambivalent role of Western education in Edendale. Rather than a straightforward solution, schooling operates within historical and structural processes that simultaneously reinforce and undermine social order, knowledge transmission, and moral governance. This tension underscores the need to consider education's effects not only on individual behaviour but also on the wider community and the continuity of AIKS.

As I have already discussed, some knowledge holders widely identify the collapse of the YMCA as a critical structural void that allowed social decay to flourish. Knowledge holders consistently highlighted the YMCA as a central institution in guiding youth and providing structured activities such as sports, boxing, and cultural events that fostered discipline, communal engagement, and moral education (KH4, Interview 2, 9 May 2025; KH2, Interview 2, 22 May 2025; KH3, Interview 3, 5 September 2025; KH6, Transect Walk, 30 October 2025). Several reflected that the closure or weakening of the YMCA under post-apartheid governance created a significant void, contributing to youth disengagement, substance abuse, and social disorder (KH4, Interview 2, 9 May 2025). The narratives collectively underscore the role of communal institutions in supporting intergenerational guidance and maintaining social cohesion and suggest that their absence has exacerbated the challenges facing young people in contemporary Edendale.

Some knowledge holders pointed to deeper systemic and economic factors exacerbating social decay. During the River of Life workshop (30 September 2025), KH3 observed post-1994 migration trends: "*Those who could afford it moved away from Edendale, leaving a void. Many children who study here come from poor families or families without parents… They lack guidance and are in a sad situation*". KH2 noted that migration due to rural conflict contributed to instability: "*People fleeing conflict (Inkatha and UDF/ANC fighting) settled in Edendale because here we've got water, we've got electricity… These new residents are not from Edendale*" (Interview 1, 9 May 2025).

KH11 (i.e. the knowledge holder who had not participated in the oral history interviews, but did attend the Transect Walk and River of Life workshop), in the River of Life workshop on 30 October 2025, criticised political leadership: "*The government today is not what we fought for… They are fighting for their own stomachs*". He proposed strict measures: "*Buy a farm,*

build a 10-storey prison there, and lock away all criminals… Prison currently allows criminals to live comfortably".

KH5, in the River of Life workshop on 30 October 2025, advocated youth independence and entrepreneurship: "*Social grant money earned in Edendale leaves the very same day. You earn it today, and it leaves today for Pick 'n Pay or whatever… This prevents wealth circulation and community stability*".

Overall, the narratives demonstrate that, according to the knowledge holders, social decay in Edendale – manifesting as drug use, alcohol abuse, crime, and moral decline- is closely linked to the destruction of communal structures like the YMCA, compounded by systemic failures including economic disenfranchisement, migration, and political mismanagement. Knowledge holders consistently stressed the urgent need to restore guidance, structure, and community-focused interventions to address the youth crisis.

7.7.4 Loss of African identity and mental colonisation

This sub-theme examines the psychological, cultural, and social impacts of colonial and missionary interventions on the people of Edendale, highlighting how Western education, religion, language, and social norms disrupted Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and governing. As should already be somewhat apparent from the data already presented, across oral history, Transect Walk, and River of Life data generation, knowledge holders emphasised the internalisation of Eurocentric standards, which diminished self-esteem, suppressed Indigenous knowledge systems, and imposed mental frameworks that devalued African identity.

KH4 described a pervasive internal conflict: "*The biggest mistake we made as Black people is that we abandoned what was ours. We adopted what belongs to other nations. Now we are lost*" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). He argued that abandoning Indigenous education for Western learning left the community "damaged". KH7 also observed the cognitive impact of Western schooling: "*Western education helped academically, but it colonised our minds. Our children started to think like Europeans, not like Africans. Mentally, Africans are still colonised by white supremacy, resulting in mental imprisonment while physically free*". As mentioned earlier, he specifically noted the role of language in eroding respect: children speaking English to demonstrate education "took away the dignity of the elders" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025).

In the same interview, KH7 further described cumulative cultural loss: "*We have lost our self-esteem, yeah, and we have lost part of our heritage, yeah, and lost a part of our tradition*". As presented earlier, he reflected on shifts in socialisation, noting that the transition from agrarian and communal forms of manhood to wage labour altered the idea of adulthood: "*The idea of a man changed from one who worked the land to someone who worked for a salary. The knowledge of becoming a man through our own ways went down*". KH3 highlighted the psychological impact of missionary teachings: "*So people started to move away from their true selves, trying to please the church. We became overly dependent on others… We do not think for ourselves anymore*" (Interview 3, 28 August 2025).

KH8 lamented the loss of cultural knowledge through dress and storytelling: "*When they stopped wearing their traditional clothes, they also stopped speaking about their meaning. So, the knowledge behind the clothing disappeared with the clothing*". He added that youth now regard oral tradition as "outdated", preferring modern media such as television and technology (Interview 2, 12 May 2025). KH4 contrasted this with other communities: "*Indians hold onto their culture. Their children know who they are*" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). As noted earlier, the suppression and marginalisation of African medicine not only reduced practical health options but also contributed to the erosion of Indigenous knowledge systems, undermining cultural identity, communal authority, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. Together, these observations highlight how the displacement of traditional practices, both medicinal and educational, intersects with broader shifts in youth engagement and cultural continuity in Edendale.

KH7 thus underscored the importance of intergenerational knowledge transmission:

> Because your identity is important, you know your roots and can teach young ones things like *Izithakazelo*… how to work together as a community. Remember, it takes a village to raise a child. There is nothing wrong with learning other languages, but you must not forget your background. You must be proud of who you are. (Interview 3,18 September 2025)

In the same interview, KH7 argued that "*African ways must be preserved so the current generation knows they were born in Africa*" (Interview 3, 5 September 2025). KH3 noted that African values were instilled "*more in the home than in the church*" and argued that cultural evolution occurs alongside Western influence: "*I would not say that without the Western way Black people would be backward, not at all, because everyone evolves. We were also*

evolving" (Interview 3, 28 Aug 2025). This reflection is significant because it challenges a binary framing of cultural change as loss versus preservation. Instead, it recognises African communities as agents navigating multiple knowledge systems, selectively adapting and integrating external influences while sustaining Indigenous epistemic frameworks. Such insights underscore the nuanced ways in which Edendale residents negotiate continuity and change, revealing the adaptive capacities of AIKS under colonial and post-colonial pressures. At the same time, this adaptive process involves significant cultural shifts.

KH4 observed that the community became increasingly Anglicised: "*Edendale community changed. Zulu speakers started speaking English. Edendale became an English-speaking society*". External markers of status emerged, including carrying newspapers, pens, or hats and adopting Western clothing. Traditional music, architecture, and household aesthetics were replaced by overseas influences (KH7, Interview 3, 18 September 2025). KH5 noted the Christianisation of social identifiers, observing: "*Edendale was called esemakholweni (among the believers)*" (Interview 3, 24 September 2025). The process of mental colonisation and the loss of identity in Edendale can be likened to being handed a highly detailed new map (Western education and science) while being told that the ancestral map (Indigenous knowledge) was incorrect and dangerous. The new map enabled navigation through colonial and urban systems but simultaneously erased the language, landmarks, and spiritual significance of the community's homeland, leaving its members to view their true starting point with shame and self-doubt.

7.8 Resilience, Syncretism, and the Call to Relearn

This theme examines how the Edendale community has, according to the knowledge holders, navigated the pressures of colonial and Western influence, highlighting the strategies that have enabled AIKS to persist despite social, cultural, and institutional disruption. The data foregrounds the resilience embedded in syncretic practices, in which Indigenous knowledge and Western systems coexist, and in the community's efforts to validate, adapt, and revive traditional medicines, rituals, and moral frameworks. The sub-themes examined in this section – persistence through syncretism, resilience and validation of Indigenous medicine, and calls to return to cultural roots- reveal the complex strategies through which knowledge holders navigate continuity and change. While these practices demonstrate efforts to sustain African epistemologies and reinforce social cohesion, they also reflect selective adaptation

and negotiation in response to enduring colonial and post-colonial pressures. This critical lens highlights the community's agency in preserving cultural knowledge, as well as the tensions and compromises inherent in maintaining traditional practices within a transformed social and institutional landscape.

7.8.1 Persistence through syncretism (doing both)

This sub-theme captures what the data show about how African communities in Edendale maintained cultural resilience by integrating traditional rituals and spiritual practices with Christianity. Across oral history, Transect Walk, and River of Life data generation, most knowledge holders described how the dual practice of Christianity alongside Indigenous customs enabled the persistence of African identity, moral frameworks, and community cohesion despite colonial and missionary pressures. However, it is critical to distinguish syncretism from the continuity of AIKS. While some *amakholwa* descendants engaged in dual practices, such as church attendance alongside the burning of *impepho*, these practices emerged within already ruptured epistemic frameworks, following missionary enculturation that had severed direct intergenerational transmission of pre-colonial knowledge systems (as discussed in Chapter Three). KH3, for example, observed that their religious grandfather "*had adopted religion*" but "*still honoured the ancestors*". He "*still slaughtered to remember those who had passed*" and used a "*sacred space umsamo*" to invoke ancestral presence. KH3 emphasised that both systems are "*relevant, because we are spiritual beings*" and ancestors "*continue to live and are still part of us*" (Interview 3, 28 August 2025). KH8 recalled being told that practices before churches were established in old Edendale: "*Incense was burned, slaughtering was done, everything was practised… It was not a problem. It was allowed*". He personally believes "*in God through the ancestors*" and stressed the need to "*burn impepho and call on the elders, the ancestors, and speak with them*", noting that abandoning such customs causes "*problems even in marriages*" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025).

KH7 explained that early families "*adopted Christianity as well as tradition because they brewed Zulu beer*". While Christian followers embraced faith, traditionalists "*practised both Christianity and African ways such as Sangoma*". Weddings often combined *lobola* (traditional) and church ceremonies, illustrating practical integration (Interview 3, 18 September 2025). KH4 affirmed: "*For most black people, it is not easy to get rid of our rituals and culture, but we practise both*", despite Christian pressure to abandon customs (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). KH3 confirmed that Wesleyans and Catholics "*continue as*

before, as our elders used to" and "*do both*", merging ceremonies such as slaughtering, dancing, drinking *umqombothi*, lighting candles, and burning *impepho* (Interview 3, 28 August).

Syncretism was not without tension. KH7, in the second interview (26 May 2025), observed that "*only later in some churches it became forbidden*" to perform rituals, causing family conflicts. Some African Traditional Churches were deemed "barbaric", while non-believers were labelled "betrayers" for not embracing Christianity. KH3 described born-again Christians who "*no longer slaughter, because they have converted*", expressing disbelief at those who labelled ancestors "demons" (Interview 3, 28 August 2025). KH3 and KH8 remembered being told to abandon African mourning customs and medicine in favour of Christian practices.

Syncretism extended beyond ritual to music, marriage, and collective labour. Church music coexisted with traditional music: KH4 mentioned during the River of Life workshop that "*They were playing traditional music. But even here in the church, they used to play music, church music*" (River of Life workshop, 30 October), resulting in a combination of both. Polygamy persisted alongside Christianity; for example, a church interpreter "*had five wives*", showing temporary acceptance of traditional social structures (KH6, River of Life workshop, 30 October 2025). Building practices reflected syncretism as believers collectively constructed houses using colonial-era clay bricks while maintaining traditional communal labour practices (KH4, River of Life workshop, 30 October 2025). Knowledge holders emphasised that syncretism was a strategic and necessary form of cultural preservation, ensuring the continuity of African identity amid colonial and religious transformations. The data suggests that dual practice, "doing both", enabled African communities in Edendale to maintain spiritual grounding, social cohesion, and moral guidance, demonstrating resilience and adaptability in the face of external pressures.

7.8.2 Resilience and validation of indigenous medicine

This theme captures the persistent strength, credibility, and relevance of African Indigenous Medicine (AIM) in Edendale, as suggested by the data, despite historical suppression, social stigmatisation, and structural pressures from Western biomedical systems. Across oral history, Transect Walk, and River of Life data generation, many knowledge holders consistently affirmed that AIM has endured because it is effective, accessible, and grounded in a scientific logic aligned with African epistemologies, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Their

narratives suggest a system that has resisted erasure both through everyday practice and conscious revival, particularly during crises.

As discussed above, KH3, KH7, and KH8 emphasised that AIM is not merely a cultural relic but a functional and empirically grounded healing system. As discussed, KH7 argued that African medicine should also be understood as science: "*the only difference is that it's not via a laboratory*". He narrated a case in which a friend, after spending "*about seven hundred thousand*" on unsuccessful hospital treatment, recovered through African herbal treatment costing only "*three hundred rand a bottle*". For him, continued trust among "*ninety percent of African people*" demonstrates AIM's enduring validity (Interview 2, 6 May 2025).

As previously discussed, KH8 identified specific herbs, such as iboza and umhlonyane (African wormwood), as long-standing remedies for flu. However, he noted that urban youth increasingly lack this knowledge, observing that the West has won in those contexts (Interview 2, 12 May 2025). However, revival narratives were also evident: KH7 described the return to Indigenous remedies during the COVID-19 pandemic, stating: "*There was umhlonyane and umsuzwane… people were brainwashed to believe otherwise, but both help heal*" (KH8 2, 22 May). This data highlights AIM's resilience even after generations of marginalisation. KH7 and KH8 emphasised the scientific reasoning embedded in AIM. KH7 observed: "*Mixing herbs is science*", noting that contemporary biomedical research often validates what communities have long practised (26 May 2025). KH7 also lamented the erosion of simple home remedies, such as peach-tree leaf mixtures, while expressing hope in current revival efforts. Similarly, KH3 and KH5 highlighted the connection between Indigenous diet and wellbeing, contrasting traditional foods such as *isijingi* and wild spinach with modern processed foods. Knowledge holders argued that rising illness among youth who reject Indigenous foods underscores the nutritional and medicinal value embedded in AIM.

Structural and practical factors also shape AIM's continued relevance. KH1, KH3, KH4, and KH7 noted that affordability drives many to seek traditional healing, because "Black people are poor" (26 May 2025) and cannot always afford Western medicine. Knowledge holders also emphasised AIM's disciplined nature, highlighting behavioural rules to enhance efficacy. As already presented above, KH7 described abstaining from certain foods like pork, waking before others, or sexual abstinence during treatment, illustrating that AIM is both holistic and regulated. Taste and regional specificity were further highlighted. KH7 contrasted Western medicine, often "sweetened" and palatable, with traditional mixtures that could be unpleasant and sometimes effective only in certain localities due to ecological specificity (26 May 2025).

KH8 stressed the lack of integration between AIM and Western medicine: "*Indigenous knowledge is out there; Western knowledge is out there… There has not been a major effort to integrate them*" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025). This separation forces individuals into an either-or choice rather than a complementary approach. Environmental changes also threaten AIM. KH1 observed that traditional healing is deeply tied to place, being dependent on specific trees, roots, and rivers, and noted that "*as development occurred, those places disappeared*" (Interview 3, 5 September 2025). This highlights the intertwined vulnerability of Indigenous medicine and the natural environment that sustains it.

Overall, knowledge holder narratives emphasise that AIM remains resilient and scientifically grounded, sustained through practice, cultural knowledge, and ecological understanding, despite systemic pressures from Western medicine, urbanisation, and social change.

7.8.3 The call to return to roots and restore culture

This theme captures a strong and recurring sentiment among the knowledge holders: that the widespread social fragmentation, moral decline, and identity loss in Edendale can be traced to the abandonment of Indigenous cultural foundations. Across data, knowledge holders consistently linked present social challenges, including crime, disrespect, disunity, declining morals, and systemic failures, to the erosion of African cultural foundations, presenting a broadly shared view that restoring cultural knowledge is essential for social cohesion and dignity. KH7 expressed this sentiment bluntly: "*We adopted what belongs to other nations. Now we are lost… We must go back to our roots… Without that, this nation will collapse*" (Interview 3, 18 July 2025).

Similarly, KH2, in his second interview (12 May 2025), insisted that African people cannot fully exist without their culture, highlighting the importance of teaching children about their origins to preserve values and anchor their identity. KH3 emphasised that maintaining traditional ways is "very, very important", arguing for moral regeneration led by families and supported by the state (Interview 3, 28 August). KH4, in his second oral history interview (12 May 2025), reinforced the centrality of identity, insisting that youth must know their roots, clan names, and communal responsibilities. These accounts collectively indicate a strong consensus among knowledge holders on the necessity of cultural restoration.

Complementing this shared view, KH5 highlighted the practical benefits of cultural continuity, noting that it prevents young people from "*thinking they were born overseas*" and reinforces pride in African ways of living (Interview 2, 9 May 2025). In their interviews,

KH3 and KH4 proposed concrete strategies for rebuilding cohesion, emphasising structured education, youth activities, and local economic empowerment. In his third interview (18 September 5 July 2025), as discussed earlier, KH7 recalled the earlier role of the YMCA, which offered boxing, karate, table tennis, and ballroom dancing to engage youth productively, arguing that reviving such structures alongside teaching rituals, respect for elders, and ancestral practices would restore discipline and social order.

KH3 similarly emphasised the absence of structure as a core issue, advocating for community centres, arts programmes, and local economic circulation to redirect youth energy from harmful behaviours (28 August 2025). In their interviews, KH3, KH4, and KH8 also proposed community workshops and cultural education days, supported by storytelling and pamphlets highlighting figures such as Princess Magogo, who used music to transmit Indigenous knowledge. KH3, KH6, and KH11, during the Transect Walk on 30 October 2025, stressed the importance of specific customs, such as maintaining family graves, as tools for communal interaction and value reinforcement. KH6 also highlighted the need to document Indigenous knowledge, acknowledging that oral transmission has been disrupted (Interview 2, 4 September 2025). While there was broad agreement on the need to restore culture, a diversity of views emerged regarding the feasibility and scope of revival. KH4, KH7, and KH8 expressed pessimism about whether today's youth can fully embrace cultural teachings, citing pervasive alcohol use, erosion of discipline, and urbanisation as barriers. KH4 also noted practical impossibilities, such as restoring home burials due to land scarcity and demographic changes, as well as government restrictions on corporal punishment that weaken traditional discipline (River of Life workshop, 30 October).

KH3 observed that urbanisation has intensified processes of cultural erosion by disrupting intergenerational relationships that previously sustained knowledge transmission. She noted that contemporary lifestyles have separated generations, explaining that "*in the past, grandparents lived with families and imparted knowledge. Today, parents move away, and the grandparents are not always present*" (3, 28 August 2025). She further elaborated that the migration of community leaders and families out of Edendale has weakened the social fabric necessary for cultural continuity, stating:

> Those who could afford it moved away from Edendale… and I think they left a void… I see a kind of 'everyone for themselves' attitude now, as if people no longer care… that sense of pride is gone… I think children today lack guidance because the people who

could have continued to be guides moved away. (River of Life workshop, 30 October 2025)

KH3 also reflected on the vulnerability of orally transmitted knowledge to colonial and Westernising disruptions. She explained that African knowledge systems were historically sustained through oral transmission across generations, but that external interventions undermined this process: "*Africans used to hand down knowledge orally from generation to generation. So, because it was oral, when something from the outside came and said, 'stop this', it stopped, and the continuity broke*". She concluded that, as a result, "at some point, this knowledge was cut off" (Interview 3, 28 August 2025).

KH6 added that physical structures such as the YMCA and stadiums persist. However, without the influence of guiding families or collective will, such facilities alone cannot restore cultural transmission (River of Life workshop, 30 October 2025). KH4 emphasised that "*restoration must begin at home; if cultural teachings are absent in the household, schools and churches cannot compensate for the loss*" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). This highlights a nuanced view that, while there is consensus on the importance of culture, the knowledge holders feel that its revival faces practical, generational, and structural constraints. In sum, knowledge holder narratives reveal both a shared commitment to returning to Indigenous roots and diverse perspectives on the practicality of cultural restoration. This integration of the same and diverse views strengthens the theme, demonstrating that calls for cultural renewal are both urgent and complex, requiring family-based transmission, community engagement, and structural support.

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter has presented knowledge holder narratives as co-created epistemic accounts that affirm Edendale's pre-colonial presence and the endurance of AIKS despite layered processes of displacement. Drawing on oral history interviews, the Transect Walk, and the River of Life method, the chapter foregrounds raw narratives, observations, and reflections through which Indigenous knowledge is remembered, negotiated, and sustained within a historically disrupted landscape. Organised thematically, the data reveal a richly textured portrait of AIKS as holistic, morally grounded, and pedagogically intentional, encompassing mentorship, orality, communal responsibility, spiritual accountability, and healing practices rooted in land and ancestry. The accounts consistently affirm Edendale's pre-colonial

presence, dismantling the colonial fiction of "empty land" through memories of Queen Machibisa, the Zondi chieftaincy, *amaqhuqwana,* and ancestral burial grounds.

However, while knowledge holders reconstruct AIKS as an integrated moral-pedagogical universe that shaped identity, discipline, and belonging, the narratives also expose the fragility and contestation inherent in these systems. They highlight tensions between continuity and disruption, illustrating how colonial and Western interventions, missionary schooling, land dispossession, wage labour, and biomedical dominance reordered time, authority, and social life, producing uneven effects on intergenerational respect, communal cohesion, and cultural transmission. However, even amid rupture, the voices of knowledge holders reveal strategic resilience: in the simultaneous performance of ancestral rituals and Christian practice, in pandemic-era returns to *umhlonyane*, in the care of family graves, and in the persistent exhortation to "return to roots." These are not mere acts of nostalgia, but deliberate assertions of epistemic continuity, demonstrating that African knowledge in Edendale is simultaneously adaptive, contested, and enduring.

Importantly, this chapter presents data as co-created knowledge generated through dialogical encounters that honour African ways of speaking, remembering, and knowing. It does not interpret; it bears witness. This is in line with the stated intention of the study in Chapter One – to re-centre African epistemic agency within the historical and contemporary context of Edendale. The task of interpretation – of tracing the arc from epistemic displacement to rehumanisation, from learning to unlearning to relearning, belongs to the next chapter. There, these narratives will be read through an Afrocentric lens to illuminate not only what was lost but how African communities in Edendale continue to reclaim, regenerate, and reassert their epistemic sovereignty.

Discussion and Findings

8.1 Introduction

Chapter Seven presented the empirical data from this study, generated through oral history interviews, the River of Life workshop, and the transect walk. It documents how knowledge holders in Edendale narrate the historical entanglement of AIKS with Western institutions, including missionary settlement, colonial schooling, and land dispossession. This chapter provides the analysis and discussion of this data in relation to the research questions. To realise this objective, the analysis is conducted using two complementary approaches within the Afrocentric methodological framework outlined in Chapter Five. The first method, inductive analysis (Sections 8.2–8.6), operates from an emic orientation, privileging knowledge holders' own language, meanings, and interpretive frameworks. grounding interpretation in community epistemologies and lived experience. Through this lens, the chapter unfolds as an epistemic journey that reaffirms Indigenous sovereignty as the foundation of knowledge production. While the colonial myth of *terra nullius* has been widely challenged in historical and postcolonial scholarship (e.g., Marks, 1970; Bundy, 1979), this study does not seek to re-expose it as a historical falsehood. Rather, it re-enacts its deconstruction through an Afrocentric methodology grounded in Edendale's oral histories, embodied memory, and communal epistemologies. In doing so, Indigenous sovereignty is affirmed not merely as a historical claim but as a present-day epistemic condition.

Building on this foundation, this analysis foregrounds AIKS in Edendale as sustained through the descendants of pre-existing Indigenous communities whose presence in the Msunduzi valley predated both Pretorius and Allison. Despite displacement, these communities were not epistemically erased and remain the living carriers of AIKS in contemporary Edendale. On this basis, the inductive analysis reconstructs AIKS as a holistic, relational, and morally grounded epistemology centred on structured mentorship, orality, communal identity, spirituality, and healing. This reconstruction does not contribute new empirical claims about land occupancy or precolonial organisation per se; instead, it enacts a decolonial praxis that restores epistemic agency to the community as co-authors of their own histories and knowledge systems. Knowledge holders emerge not as informants of a past to be verified, but as epistemic subjects actively interpreting continuity, disruption, and regeneration within their lived realities. The analysis then examines how colonial and Western institutions functioned

as interlocking mechanisms of epistemic reordering. These institutions transformed not only material conditions but also moral imagination, authority structures, and self-perception, precipitating forms of socio-cultural fragmentation evident in the erosion of intergenerational respect, the rise of individualism, and crises of identity and belonging. However, the narrative does not culminate in loss. Instead, it traces how knowledge holders articulate resilience through strategic syncretism, the continued validation of Indigenous medicine, and collective calls to 're-centre roots', a phrase demanding critical interrogation: not temporal return to pristine origins (impossible after irreversible rupture), but epistemic reorientation that positions African cosmological frameworks as the interpretive centre for addressing contemporary crises. These practices reflect active epistemic agency and signal processes of relearning through which AIKS are re-engaged as living, adaptive epistemologies.

This inductive movement directly addresses the study's three research objectives, as outlined in Chapter One, in the following ways:

Objective I: documenting historical and evolving AIKS is fulfilled through the reconstruction of precolonial epistemic systems and their adaptive continuity.

Objective II: analysing the impacts of Western knowledge from an Afrocentric perspective is addressed by examining institutional epistemic reordering.

Objective III: understanding how these impacts transformed Indigenous practices is developed through analyses of altered mentorship structures, land relations, and healing protocols.

Collectively, these analyses demonstrate not only what was fractured but also how knowledge holders actively reconfigure, reclaim, and sustain AIKS under conditions of colonial modernity. Throughout, the analysis foregrounds African voices as co-interpreters of history and meaning, rejecting portrayals of Edendale as a site of passive assimilation. Instead, Edendale emerges as a contested epistemic terrain where African knowledge systems persist, adapt, and assert relevance within the constraints of a colonial settlement. In this way, the chapter contributes to broader debates on decoloniality and epistemic justice, affirming that the recovery of Indigenous knowledge is not merely an academic exercise but a moral and political act of rehumanisation.

The second method, deductive analysis (Sections 8.7–8.11), explicitly advances the argument that AIKS evident in Edendale today endures through the descendants of pre-colonial Indigenous communities. This analysis operates from an etic orientation, re-examining the

same dataset through the Afrocentric theoretical framework developed in Chapter Four. This approach does not seek to confirm theory empirically but to sensitise interpretation toward the processes through which epistemic transformation occurs. Theoretical concepts are therefore deployed as analytical lenses, enabling the analysis to expose where and how learning itself becomes the site of dehumanisation and rehumanisation. While the inductive analysis documents AIKS as epistemic content and colonial disruption as historical experience, the deductive analysis theorises how these narratives reveal a recursive process of epistemic transformation. Within the learning–unlearning–relearning triad, learning denotes colonial epistemic displacement, understood as the internalisation of inferiority through institutional reordering, and stands in tension with precolonial Indigenous learning as relational pedagogy. The data suggest a four-stage movement comprising Indigenous learning as sovereign epistemic inheritance, followed by colonial learning as displacement, unlearning as critical rupture, and relearning as relational reconstruction. It is this latter movement, involving the unlearning of colonial hierarchies and the relearning of epistemic sovereignty, that constitutes learning as decolonial praxis. This process reflects a recursive navigation through which African people restore themselves as subjects, rather than objects, of knowledge.

8.2 Origins of Edendale: Reclaiming Indigenous Memory Against the “Empty Land” Myth

The narratives of knowledge holders presented in Chapter Seven depict Edendale as a politically organised and pedagogically structured landscape before Pretorius was granted the land by Queen Victoria after British annexation of Natal, and hence missionary settlement in 1851, as discussed in Chapters Three and Six. This challenges colonial historiography, which frames the area’s origins around the arrival of Reverend James Allison. Rather than an undifferentiated or disordered space awaiting intervention, the data reveal structured systems of authority for the area around Edendale under the Zondi chieftaincy, including regulated land allocation, communal farming, and recognised leadership, aligning with African-centred scholarship that conceptualises precolonial governance as relational, spatially embedded, and socially regulated rather than anarchic or incidental. This finding also challenges the colonial appropriation of the notion of tabula rasa (blank slate), which assumed that African societies possessed no legitimate systems of knowledge, governance, education, or philosophy prior to European intervention. Just as colonialism invoked the legal fiction of terra nullius (empty

land) to legitimise territorial dispossession, it simultaneously relied on the epistemic fiction of tabula rasa to legitimise the imposition of Western education, Christianity, and colonial governance by portraying African minds, cultures, and histories as empty or deficient (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The two assumptions operated in tandem: while terra nullius denied the legitimacy of African custodianship over land, tabula rasa denied the legitimacy of African ways of knowing. Afrocentric epistemology fundamentally rejects this colonial logic by affirming that African societies possessed sophisticated and coherent systems of governance, knowledge production, ethical reasoning, environmental stewardship, and education long before colonial contact (Asante, 2007; Mazama, 2001). Accordingly, the issue was never the absence of Indigenous knowledge but its systematic marginalisation and attempted replacement through processes of epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The narratives presented here, therefore, demonstrate not the emergence of knowledge from a 'blank slate' but the persistence and resilience of Indigenous epistemologies despite sustained colonial efforts to suppress, fragment, and delegitimise them.

Significantly, these narratives situate Edendale within a broader Indigenous landscape predating Pretorius's ownership of *Welverdiend* farm (Chapter Three). While knowledge holders do not claim uninterrupted occupation of the Georgetown site – or what was the original Edendale mission station - itself, their accounts establish historical connections to the region, which later enabled their ancestors to settle on land sold or leased by the descendants of Allison's followers, bringing with them enduring knowledge practices despite prior colonial displacements (Meintjes, 2020). Rather than framing settlement as a binary of pristine Indigenous presence versus colonial invasion, the data indicate a layered history of displacement and negotiation, in which Indigenous communities reasserted their presence on ancestral landscapes through strategic engagement with colonial land markets, sustaining epistemic sovereignty amid constrained circumstances. At the same time, the Edendale case contrasts with missionary-influenced and settler-oriented accounts that treat 1851 as the primary historical point of departure. Works such as Croeser (2013), Gwala (2019), and Meintjes (2020) foreground missionary settlement as Edendale's origin while largely ignoring prior African governance, effectively rendering the Indigenous political order invisible and reframing history around colonial arrival.

The recovery of Machibisa as a precolonial female ruler by one of the knowledge holders further complicates dominant historiographical narratives. As I discussed in Chapter Three,

early colonial scholars such as Bryant (1929) and Krige (1936) portrayed precolonial KwaZulu-Natal as politically unstable or depopulated, often attributing this to Shaka's militarism. Revisionist historians later challenged these claims. Cobbing (1988) demonstrated how the Mfecane narrative functioned as an alibi for external violence, while Hamilton (1993) showed how colonial administrators selectively curated oral traditions to produce particular political imaginaries. However, the Edendale data indicate that even revisionist scholarship has remained mainly at the level of macro-political reconstruction**,** often leaving localised governance and gendered authority under-theorised. This layered erasure of colonial imposition, compounded by earlier Indigenous displacements, complicates recovery work but does not negate epistemic agency. Analytically, what matters is not the recovery of pristine continuity, but attention to the fragments that persisted underground and later enabled rupture. Remembering Machibisa's authority thus extends revisionist debates by foregrounding spatially specific and gendered sovereignty**,** exposing the limits of existing historiography rather than merely corroborating it.

Beyond formal leadership, the data highlight micro-practices through which Indigenous sovereignty and epistemic continuity were sustained after colonisation by those living in the broader area, as well as by those who became part of the Edendale settlement in the decades after its initial founding. Knowledge holders identified home burials, ancestral spatial markers, Indigenous naming practices, and designated farming zones as enduring forms of historical presence. These findings extend scholarship on African relational land tenure (Etherington, 1971; Guy, 2009) by demonstrating that land functioned not only as an economic resource or political territory, but as a pedagogical space through which authority, memory, and intergenerational instruction were enacted. In this sense, land emerges as epistemic infrastructure rather than a neutral backdrop, complicating historiographical approaches that treat governance primarily at the level of chiefly institutions.

At the same time, the Edendale data complicate assumptions of uninterrupted Indigenous memory. Some knowledge holders reproduced missionary chronologies that begin in 1851, indicating that epistemic rupture operates unevenly rather than absolutely, even though they were not descendants of the original Edendale settlers but of people living in the broader area before Edendale was founded. This finding problematises totalising formulations of epistemicide (Mignolo, 2007), suggesting that colonial epistemic violence fragments the transmission of knowledge without fully extinguishing Indigenous ways of knowing. Further complexity emerges in relation to earlier forms of occupation. Although archaeological

research confirms San presence in the region (Huffman, 2004; Schlebusch et al., 2016), this history did not surface spontaneously in community narratives, pointing to layered processes of erasure within Indigenous memory itself. Epistemic loss thus appears not only externally imposed but also mediated through selective remembrance shaped by colonial disruption.

Naming emerged as a potent mechanism of epistemic displacement. The attribution of the name *Edendale* through missionary intervention reflects a broader colonial practice in which renaming functioned to overwrite Indigenous toponyms and their ecological, ancestral, and political meanings. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) argument that naming constitutes an act of possession is instructive here, as the authority to name simultaneously asserts the authority to define history and legitimacy. Colonial archival records that begin with missionary arrival institutionalised this displacement, not by demonstrating an absence of African governance, but by removing African people from the centre of their own historical narrative, an epistemic relocation consistent with Asante's (1987) principle of location.

Land titling further reconfigured Indigenous sovereignty by introducing individual ownership within colonial legal frameworks. While title deeds offered formal recognition, knowledge holders described them as fundamentally misaligned with prior relational land arrangements. This transition reflects a shift from communal stewardship to commodified ownership, an ethical and epistemic rupture identified by Ramose (2005). In the Edendale area, prior to the arrival of European settlers, communal landholding had enabled the transmission of agricultural knowledge, healing practices, ritual observance, burial customs, and governance protocols. Individual titling reconstituted land as property rather than pedagogy, weakening its role as a collective teaching space and altering relationships between people, place, and ancestry. It also potentially reinforced the separation of Allison's followers from the local Indigenous population.

Despite processes of renaming and re-territorialisation, epistemic erasure in Edendale was uneven and contested. The coexistence of internalised colonial narratives of the original settlers and those who later moved to the area alongside persistent affirmations of Indigenous governance reflects what Odora Hoppers (2002) describes as fragmented colonial learning, in which imposed epistemologies disrupt but do not entirely displace Indigenous knowledge systems. This section, therefore, moves beyond a binary of erasure versus continuity. The Edendale case demonstrates that epistemic resilience emerges within conditions of rupture, partial remembrance, and contestation. Rather than recovering a pristine past, the data

illuminate how Indigenous sovereignty is reasserted through fragmented yet persistent practices of remembering, naming, and locating oneself on the land.

Rule and John's (2011) four-dimensional context framework clarifies how these findings operate across layered epistemic realities. Taking the 1851–1860s missionary settlement period as the 'current reality', the background dimension encompasses precolonial governance structures under the Zondi chieftaincy and Machibisa's authority, historical formations operating at a temporal distance yet constitutive of the epistemic foundations of many of the people who ultimately settled Edendale. The foreground comprises immediate institutional forces that shaped daily experience, including missionary settlement from 1851, cadastral reordering from the 1860s, and colonial land titling, which transformed relational stewardship into commodified ownership for the *amakholwa*. The liftground denotes how dominant institutions positioned Western knowledge as universal while rendering Indigenous presence invisible, as evidenced by missionary historiography that begins Edendale's history in 1851, archival silences surrounding Machibisa's authority, and the epistemic violence of renaming that recast the land as historically vacant prior to *Welverdiend* being gifted to Pretorius. Most critically, the underground dimension – i.e. the personal and communal discourse often submerged, hidden and silenced by the liftground - reveals submerged ontological commitments persisting beneath dominant structures for many of the later occupants: home burials maintained despite roads being built over ancestral graves, *onokesheni* naming practices preserving memory of original inhabitants, and the recovery of Machibisa not merely as a historical figure but as an epistemic assertion of female sovereignty.

These dimensions did not operate sequentially but were relationally entangled**.** While Allison's followers were already reshaped through Christian conversion and Europeanisation, colonial liftground dominance, expressed through settler institutions, missionary pedagogy, and land control, coexisted with the underground persistence of pre-existing Indigenous communities whose epistemic frameworks predated both Pretorius and Allison. This simultaneity does not imply that the same individuals embodied both trajectories; rather, it shows that Indigenous epistemic continuity endured through other actors in the landscape**,** providing the substrate for later processes of unlearning and relearning. This enduring epistemic foundation enables the reclamation of precolonial sovereignty not merely as historical correction, but as rehumanisation**,** restoring Africans as active subjects of their knowledge, rather than objects of colonial categorisation.

8.3 African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS): Pedagogy, Moral Foundations, and Community Structure

The accounts analysed in Chapter Seven indicate that social life in Edendale, among communities who settled after Allison and his followers, was organised through interwoven pedagogical, moral, and spiritual practices that persisted, albeit unevenly, under conditions of colonial and missionary marginalisation. These practices were sustained primarily through oral instruction and ritual participation, reflecting continuity with the AIKS of the pre-existing inhabitants while being adapted by successive generations of settlers. They embodied ethical conduct, operating within what Rule and John (2011) term the underground dimension of context: submerged ontological commitments and epistemic orientations that persist beneath dominant structures without formal recognition or institutional validation. Recalling this concept situates AIKS not as residual or informal knowledge, but as an epistemic infrastructure that remained operative beneath dominant colonial systems.

Inductively, AIKS in Edendale emerge not as discrete cultural elements, but as an integrated epistemic system in which learning, morality, spirituality, and social organisation were mutually constitutive. This finding aligns with the conceptual framing advanced in Chapter Two, in which AIKS are understood as relational, processual, and ethically grounded rather than as compartmentalised domains (Ani, 2013; Dei, 2012; Zinyeka, 2014). However, the Edendale data extend this literature by showing how such integration was enacted through everyday social arrangements rather than articulated as abstract philosophy. The findings further suggest that Indigenous education within the broader Edendale area operated relationally and experientially, embedded in daily life and distributed across households and generations. Mentorship, apprenticeship, and communal accountability functioned as primary pedagogical mechanisms, with elders, ancestors, and collective memory serving as sources of moral and epistemic authority. While similar patterns are documented in empirical studies of African Indigenous education (Seroto & Higgs, 2025), the Edendale case demonstrates that these practices were not uniformly resilient. There is little data, for example, on the extent to which Allison's followers retained any Indigenous practices (and as discussed, the literature suggests these were largely erased); for those who came to occupy Edendale after the establishment of the mission station, continuity occurred unevenly: some pedagogical and moral practices endured through oral transmission and embodied learning, while others were

weakened, fragmented, or rendered less visible under colonial schooling, industrial labour, and missionary moral regulation.

Within this context, the erosion of moral and communal coherence described by participants is not interpreted as evidence of cultural deficiency or internal failure. Rather, it is understood as a consequence of epistemic displacement under colonial modernity, in which Indigenous modes of knowing, teaching, and governing were systematically de-authorised and replaced by externally imposed epistemic hierarchies. This interpretation is consistent with arguments advanced in Chapter Two that call for structural epistemic inclusion, understood not as symbolic recognition of Indigenous knowledge, but as the restoration of its authority, legitimacy, and social grounding (Ramose, 1999; Akena, 2012; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). Inductively, AIKS in Edendale, in their precolonial formation and their present-day rearticulation, are best understood as an interlocking epistemic infrastructure in which ontology (being), epistemology (knowing), and axiology (valuing) remain inseparable. The following subsections analyse five expressions of this integration, each illustrating how relational accountability underpinned personhood: structured mentorship and apprenticeship; orality and embodied learning; collective identity and communal responsibility; spirituality and ancestral accountability; and Indigenous healing practices that conceptualise wellbeing as holistic and relational. Together, these analyses address Research Objective (i) and establish the foundation for examining disruption (Objective ii) and transformation (Objective iii).

8.3.1 Structured mentorship, apprenticeship, and gendered pathways of becoming

The narrative presented under this theme in Chapter Seven indicates that, according to the knowledge holders, structured mentorship constituted the primary pedagogical mechanism through which learning was organised in the broader Edendale area prior to the arrival of white settlers. Rather than occurring through formalised instruction, learning unfolded through patterned, gendered pathways embedded in everyday social life. These pathways functioned as systems of ethical formation, shaping personhood through sustained participation in communal practices rather than through the accumulation of discrete skills. For girls and boys alike, learning was inseparable from moral cultivation. Mentorship did not merely transmit knowledge but produced moral subjectivity oriented toward relational balance and collective well-being. This finding extends Zinyeka's (2014) distinction between Indigenous knowledge as content and Indigenous Knowledge Systems as relational structures by demonstrating that mentorship functioned as an ethical architecture through which social

order was reproduced. In line with Dei's (2012) theorisation of African epistemologies as morally grounded, learning in Edendale was evaluated not by individual competence but by one's capacity to act responsibly within a web of human, ecological, and ancestral relations.

Importantly, the data suggest that the erosion of structured mentorship occurred gradually rather than suddenly. Knowledge holders consistently attributed this fragmentation to material reconfigurations of time and space under colonial modernity, particularly industrial labour and formal schooling, rather than to internal deficiencies within Indigenous systems. Wage labour disrupted the agrarian rhythms that sustained immersive apprenticeship, while schooling introduced new epistemic authorities that displaced elders as primary moral reference points. However, at least for those who settled in Edendale after the original mission expedition, these processes did not produce total displacement. Instead, many participants described forms of coexistence in which Indigenous mentorship practices persisted within domestic spaces even as formal education reshaped aspirations and identities. This coexistence aligns with Chilisa's (2012) observation that Indigenous knowledge systems demonstrate resilience in the face of rupture by adapting to shifting material realities. Notably, accounts of mentorship were often articulated through intergenerational memory rather than direct experience of early disruptions. Such recollections functioned not as nostalgia but as ethical benchmarks against which present conditions were evaluated, supporting Duranti's (1993) and Lebeau's (2020) framing of elders as custodians of moral knowledge whose authority lies in their role as ethical reference points rather than institutional power holders.

In sum, the findings indicate that structured mentorship remains foundational to AIKS in contemporary Edendale as a relational mode of pedagogy through which ethical conduct, social responsibility, and cultural continuity were and continue to be cultivated. Rooted in precolonial pedagogies and sustained through intergenerational dialogue, its partial erosion reflects epistemic displacement under colonial modernity rather than Indigenous failure, while its persistence in memory and adapted practice provides a basis for epistemic reclamation within Afrocentric frameworks (Asante, 2009; Dei, 2012).

8.3.2 Orality, storytelling, and embodied learning

Orality, storytelling, and embodied practice emerged as central pedagogical modalities through which AIKS operated amongst the descendants of the original inhabits of the broader Edendale area, according to the knowledge holders. Learning was consistently conceptualised

as inseparable from living, enacted through immersion in everyday social life rather than through abstract instruction. This confirms and extends scholarship that positions orality as the primary medium of African Indigenous pedagogy (Adedeji, 1971; Falola, 2022), while demonstrating how narrative functioned as moral reasoning rather than didactic command.

The Edendale data substantiate Thao's (2006) argument that oral knowledge is dynamic and performative, transforming through enactment rather than mechanical repetition. Storytelling operated as a mode of ethical calibration, enabling reflection, emotional resonance, and relational accountability rather than fear-based compliance. In this sense, the findings extend *Ubuntu*-based pedagogical formulations (Mkabela, 2005; Ntseane, 2011) by showing how narrative sustained moral formation through shared affect and collective interpretation.

Embodied learning further reinforced African epistemology's rejection of Cartesian separations between mind and body. As Dei (2012) argues, African learning occurs through participation and observation within communal contexts, while Scheub (1985) emphasises the role of performance in transmitting cultural memory. The Edendale case illustrates how rhythm, song, gesture, and movement functioned as epistemic media amongst the descendants of the original inhabitants of the area, confirming Ramose's (2005) assertion that African rationality is grounded in lived reasonableness rather than abstract logic. At the same time, the data complicate celebratory narratives of resilience. While the literature often emphasises the endurance of orality, participants identified technological change and colonial schooling as forces that fragmented intergenerational transmission. These processes align with analyses of colonial education as demanding epistemic surrender (Vail, 1990; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991), replacing relational learning with regimented routines. Crucially, the Edendale data indicate fragmentation rather than total collapse, pointing to partial erosion shaped by material reorganisation of attention, time, and space. Collectively, orality and embodied learning in Edendale constituted an epistemic infrastructure in which knowledge, ethics, and being were inseparable. Their persistence through adaptation challenges Western epistemic compartmentalisation and affirms African pedagogy as relational and contextually grounded rather than institutionally bounded.

8.3.3 Collective identity, communal responsibility, and social cohesion

While previous subsections focused on pedagogy, this section foregrounds how personhood itself was constituted within AIKS among the original inhabitants of the broader Edendale area. Identity emerged not as individual achievement but as relational becoming, shaped

through kinship, ancestral obligation, and communal accountability. Crucially, this African relationality, grounded in Ubuntu, embodies a distinct form of humanism that upholds rather than decentres human responsibility and agency, distinguishing it from Western posthumanist frameworks that flatten ontological distinctions between humans and nonhumans. Learning, morality, and survival were mutually constituted, as knowledge was embedded in social relations rather than privately owned or formally transmitted. Discipline functioned pedagogically rather than coercively, cultivating moral standing through alignment with elders, custom, and ancestral order. This finding resonates with Mokgoatšana's (2004) and Letšosa's (2017) analyses of *Seriti* as an ethical and ontological condition formed through social conduct rather than innate status. Authority operated as an ethical calibration, teaching that individual actions carried collective significance.

Economic relations embodied the same moral logic. Reciprocity functioned as a pedagogical practice, reinforcing relational interdependence rather than accumulation. This aligns with Mafeje's (1971) analysis of African moral economies as grounded in social reproduction rather than transactional exchange and extends it by demonstrating that economic practices also served as sites of ethical learning. Spatial arrangements further reinforced relational ontology. The absence of rigid boundaries between homesteads and the collective organisation of funerary practices integrated social, spiritual, and moral life into a single continuum. In line with Mazama's (2003) African-centred spatial philosophy, these arrangements functioned as embodied pedagogy, teaching interdependence through lived experience. Rather than nostalgia, recollections of collective living functioned as critical resources for evaluating contemporary moral shifts. This aligns with Chilisa and Preece's (2023) essential notion of remembrance, positioning Indigenous social arrangements as viable epistemic resources rather than historical residues.

8.3.4 Spirituality, ancestral order, and moral responsibility

What is analytically new in this section is the positioning of spirituality as a mode of epistemic regulation rather than merely as belief or ritual. The data indicate that amongst the original inhabitants of the broader Edendale area, spirituality structured ethical reasoning and moral accountability through ancestral presence, situating decision-making within an intergenerational continuum rather than within individual conscience or personal belief. Knowledge holders consistently described ancestors (*amadlozi*) as active and responsive presences, consulted for guidance and moral direction in everyday life. In this sense,

spirituality functioned as an organising epistemic framework through which conduct was evaluated, corrected, and realigned.

This relational ontology aligns with, yet extends, Gyekye's (2011) and Ramose's (1999) formulations of African existence as constituted through webs of relationship linking the visible and invisible realms. While these scholars theorise relationality at a philosophical level, the Edendale data demonstrate how it operated in practice as epistemic infrastructure. KH3's assertion that "I believe in God through the ancestors" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025) illustrates ancestral intermediation not as a theological contradiction but as a mechanism through which knowledge acquired legitimacy. Spirituality thus operated as what Odora Hoppers (2002) conceptualises as epistemic governance: moral decision-making required ancestral consultation not as ritual formality but as epistemic necessity. Practices such as *impepho* burning and *umsamo* maintenance were repeatedly described as processes of moral calibration rather than symbolic observance. KH4's account of these practices as ways to "tell ancestors they are remembered" (River of Life workshop, 30 October 2025) indicates that spirituality functioned to restore alignment between present conduct and ancestral expectations when ethical rupture occurred. Spiritual practice, therefore, operated as a regulatory system, recalibrating moral life through relational accountability rather than institutional sanction.

Significantly, the data complicate portrayals of missionary intervention as producing total epistemic erasure amongst existing Indigenous populations. Scholars such as Masondo (2015) and Ntombana (2015) argue that missionary activity disrupted intergenerational transmission by condemning ancestral veneration as sinful, demanding what Vail (1990) terms epistemic surrender. Knowledge holders in Edendale, however, described syncretic negotiation rather than wholesale abandonment. KH7, in his third interview on 18 September 2025, recalled that his grandfather attended church while simultaneously maintaining *umsamo* rituals, illustrating how African communities sustained epistemic continuity through strategic compartmentalisation. Ancestral authority was preserved within domestic and ritual spaces, even as Christian compliance was performed in public, allowing Indigenous epistemic frameworks to endure beneath overt missionary dominance. This pattern resonates with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) notion of epistemic resilience as a refusal to surrender intellectual sovereignty, while extending it by demonstrating how resilience operated spatially through the homestead as a site of moral and epistemic continuity beneath overt colonial dominance. Rather than disappearing, ancestral epistemology was repositioned,

rendered less visible but not extinguished, operating through quiet refusal and selective adaptation.

Knowledge holders further associated distancing from ancestral practices with moral uncertainty, understood not as theological failure but as epistemic rupture. KH8's observation that young people "no longer know whose ancestors they serve" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025) points to ethical disorientation resulting from the breakdown of intergenerational accountability. Conduct, in this framing, loses its moral anchor when ancestral dialogue is disrupted. Conversely, re-engagement with ancestral knowledge was described as restoring ethical grounding, not through doctrinal instruction but through relational reconnection. Moral certainty emerged through renewed alignment with ancestral order rather than through adherence to abstract moral codes.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that spirituality within AIKS in the broader Edendale area constituted an integrated epistemic order in which moral regulation flowed through ancestral presence rather than institutional authority. Spirituality functioned as moral infrastructure, binding being and knowing into a single relational system oriented toward maintaining social and cosmic balance. This challenges Western secular and modern binaries that separate ethics from epistemology, affirming African epistemology as inherently relational, ethical, and intergenerational in its organisation of knowledge and responsibility.

8.3.5 Indigenous Medicine, Healing Practices, and Holistic Wellness

The data, as presented in Chapter Seven, suggest that health and healing amongst the orginal inhabitants of the broader Edendale area were conceptualised as relational balance among body, community, environment, and ancestry. Wellness emerged as a moral–epistemic condition rather than a purely clinical outcome, confirming Chapter Two's characterisation of AIKS as integrative and non-dualistic (Odora Hoppers, 2002; Kaya & Seleti, 2013; Gyekye, 2011). The findings extend this literature by demonstrating how holistic philosophy is embedded in everyday language, diet, and practice, positioning health as relational attunement (Ramose, 1999). Indigenous medicine also operated with internal epistemic logics of validation grounded in communal verification and ethical discipline, extending Eyong's (2007) argument that Indigenous sciences are empirically rigorous within their own epistemic frames.

At the same time, the data confirm the marginalisation of Indigenous healing through missionary condemnation and biomedical dominance, aligning with Santos' (2014) concept

of epistemicide and Hountondji's (1997) intellectual extraversion. The Edendale case further nuances debates on epistemic extractivism by showing how appropriation simultaneously undermines community access and disrupts ecological and ritual conditions necessary for knowledge reproduction. Despite these pressures, the data demonstrate epistemic resilience through adaptive rearticulation. Renewed reliance on Indigenous remedies during contemporary crises illustrates AIKS as forward-looking and pragmatically integrative rather than oppositional, extending the work of Santos (2018) and Dei (2012). In sum, Indigenous healing in Edendale constitutes a living epistemology in which herbal efficacy, ritual practice, diet, and moral discipline are mutually constitutive. Health emerges as a relational achievement sustained through community, ecology, and ancestry, challenging biomedical reductionism while affirming the continued legitimacy and relevance of AIKS. Indigenous healing thus functions as epistemic justice in practice: affirming African bodies, ecologies, and relationalities as legitimate sites of knowledge production.

Comprehensively, the five dimensions under Theme 8.3 operated as mutually constitutive expressions of a single epistemic order rather than sequential components. Colonial modernity targeted their integration—separating knowledge from morality, healing from spirituality, and labour from pedagogy. Yet integration persisted beneath surface disruption through the underground dimension of context (Rule & John, 2011). This analysis demonstrates the operational logic of African epistemic integration in Edendale, affirming African epistemic sovereignty as a living moral infrastructure rather than a historical relic and providing the foundation for the decolonial rehumanisation examined in subsequent sections.

8.4 Colonial/Western Institutional Penetration and the Reordering of African Life and Knowledge

As argued in Chapter Two, colonial modernity did not merely introduce new institutions into African societies; it reordered the epistemic conditions under which knowledge, morality, authority, and legitimacy could be recognised (Odora Hoppers, 2002; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). This section returns to the central argument by examining how, in Edendale, colonial and Western institutions operated as what Rule and John (2011) conceptualise as the liftground of context: a dominant epistemic infrastructure that normalised Western modes of knowing as universal and civilised, while simultaneously relegating African Indigenous knowledge to the margins as informal, residual, or illegitimate.

The data demonstrate that AIKS in Edendale did not disintegrate due to internal incoherence or cultural stagnation. Instead, they were systematically reorganised through institutional mechanisms that separated domains previously held together: learning from morality, healing from spirituality, labour from pedagogy, and authority from ancestral legitimacy, as discussed in section 8.3. Missionary Christianity, mission schooling, wage labour, and Western biomedicine operated not as isolated forces but as an interlocking apparatus of epistemic substitution. As discussed in Chapter Two, this process constitutes epistemic and metaphysical violence rather than neutral modernisation. Consistent with Odora Hoppers' (2002) theorisation of epistemic rupture, the Edendale case reveals rupture as fragmentation and displacement rather than total erasure**.** Indigenous epistemologies were pushed into domestic, ritual, and informal spaces, while Western knowledge monopolised public institutions and official legitimacy. This section analyses three institutional sites through which this reordering occurred: missionary schooling, wage labour, and biomedicine, demonstrating how each contributed to epistemic displacement while simultaneously generating conditions for selective resistance, negotiation, and relearning.

8.4.1 The missionary–school complex: religion, pedagogy, and the reconstitution of epistemic authority

The missionary school complex in Edendale functioned as a foundational site of epistemic reordering through which religion, pedagogy, bodily discipline, linguistic regulation, and spatial organisation converged to remake African subjectivity. As Santos (2018) theorises through the concept of abyssal thinking, colonial modernity produced an epistemic divide that positioned Western reason as modern while rendering African knowledge invisible or mythical. In Edendale, this divide was operationalised through an integrated institutional apparatus in which children were instructed not only in literacy but also in how to speak, move, relate to authority, and interpret ancestral presence.

Colonial knowledge operated as a technology of domination, as identified by Wagoner (2003), reconfiguring subjectivity through everyday disciplinary practices. While Vail (1990) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) document epistemic surrender through timetables, examinations, and curricular control, knowledge holders' accounts foreground spatial discipline as an equally formative yet underexamined dimension of colonial pedagogy. KH2 and KH4 recount being compelled to sit and march in straight lines, with strict regulation of bodily appearance, including hair length and shoe shine. These practices contrasted sharply with circular homestead arrangements that historically embodied dialogue, reciprocity, and

collective accountability within the integrated epistemic infrastructure discussed in Section 8.3.

KH4 noted that the missionaries introduced their own disciplinary systems, displacing local practices, a dynamic that reflects the broader epistemic substitution discussed in Chapter Three. This exemplifies how spatial reordering functioned as epistemic violence, severing youth from embodied practices through which relational accountability was cultivated. Spatial ordering emerges here as epistemic violence, severing youth from embodied practices through which relational accountability was cultivated. The straight line functioned as an epistemic architecture, teaching that legitimacy flowed vertically from missionary authority rather than horizontally across community networks. In this sense, spatial reorganisation was not merely a pedagogical technique but a foundational mechanism through which colonial modernity reshaped assumptions about order, authority, and knowledge itself. This extends Comaroff and Comaroff's (1991) analysis by demonstrating that colonial pedagogy operated not only through temporal regulation and bodily discipline but through the deliberate remaking of space as a site of epistemic instruction.

Linguistic violence operated as a complementary and inseparable technology of domination. While Kamerkar (2001) and Labé et al. (2013) identify colonial language fluency as a prerequisite for legitimate knowledge, the Edendale data reveal its deeper moral and psychological dimensions. KH1 recounts being punished for speaking isiZulu and being instructed to use English exclusively (Interview 1, 15 April 2025). KH4 describes the emergence of an English-speaking elite in which *izifundiswa* were regarded as epistemically superior. This linguistic gatekeeping rendered elders' knowledge invisible not only through prohibition but through systematic devaluation, displacing oral modes of ethical calibration and undermining elders' authority without providing an equivalent moral formation, as discussed in Section 8.3.2.

The fusion of church and school further intensified this process. Ancestral practices were redefined as demonic, respect for elders was recalibrated through Church hierarchies, and language suppression operated alongside bodily regulation and spiritual delegitimisation. In this respect, the Edendale case complicates Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) focus on linguistic violence by demonstrating that language suppression derived its force from its entanglement with spatial discipline and religious condemnation. Punishment for speaking isiZulu functioned within a broader, integrated regime that produced what Fanon (1968) describes as mental colonisation, in which inferiority is internalised across multiple dimensions of

existence. The missionary school complex thus operated as what Rule and John (2011) describe as a liftground-shaping institution, systematically reorganising the conditions under which legitimacy, value, and knowledge were understood.

This analysis also refines Santos' (2014) concept of epistemicide. While epistemicide usefully names the violence of colonial knowledge destruction (and it appears possible that this was the case regarding Allison's original followers and their descendants), knowledge holders' accounts in Edendale suggest a process better described as epistemic displacement rather than total erasure. Missionaries and the colonial system actively condemned ancestral practices and destroyed Indigenous medicines, as recalled by KH2 (Interview 2, 10 September 2025), yet African epistemologies persisted through strategic syncretism and selective adaptation. Practices of "doing both" enabled ancestral authority to survive within domestic and ritual spaces even as missionary norms dominated public institutions. Epistemic authority was relocated from elders to certificates and institutions, but Indigenous knowledge endured beneath dominant structures rather than being annihilated.

This distinction responds to Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2021) caution against narratives that presume either destruction or uninterrupted resilience. Epistemic displacement captures rupture, marginalisation, and internalised devaluation without presuming epistemological extinction. As KH5 observes, the outcome was a generation that "knows technology but is lost in behaviour" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025), revealing a disjunction between technical competence and moral grounding. Knowledge came to be validated through institutional certification and linguistic conformity rather than relational accountability.

Comprehensibly, spatial discipline, linguistic regulation, and spiritual delegitimisation constituted a coordinated apparatus that reconfigured the background conditions of meaning. The missionary school complex emerges not as an isolated institution but as a central mechanism within a broader project of epistemic reordering. Its significance lies less in what it destroyed than in how it reorganised legitimacy itself, teaching successive generations to equate modernity with epistemic surrender. Yet displacement, unlike erasure, left traces in embodied memory, syncretic practice, and intergenerational transmission.

8.4.2 Wage labour, time, and the disruption of mentorship economies

The introduction of industrial labour in Edendale constituted far more than an economic shift; it precipitated a profound reconfiguration of temporal organisation, social identity, and moral responsibility amongst the inhabitants of Edendale at the time. Knowledge holders

consistently framed industrialisation not as a benign pathway to development but as a disruptive force that fractured long-standing mentorship economies, through which knowledge, ethics, and personhood were cultivated. The agrarian rhythms of the area's original inhabitants, which once structured life, attuned to seasons, livestock, and elder-guided labour, were displaced by regimented factory schedules, transforming labour from a pedagogical practice into a site of wage extraction and individualised survival. These experiences reflect Etta et al.'s (2016) argument that capitalist imperatives prioritise personal gain over communal responsibilities, eroding mechanisms of intergenerational knowledge transmission and weakening social cohesion.

Prior to the dominance of wage labour, economic activity amongst the Indigenous inhabitants of the broader Edendale area functioned as an integrated learning system. KH8 summarised this reality: "Cattle were school. Cattle were university. Cattle taught boys everything, but when cattle disappeared, the teachings disappeared" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025). Herding, farming, and homestead responsibilities were structured pedagogical spaces, where boys learned stewardship, patience, and accountability, and girls acquired competencies in food preservation, herbal care, and social conduct. Dei's (2012) concept of a moral economy of knowledge illuminates these accounts, emphasising that learning was inseparable from ethical responsibility, relational belonging, and embodied practice. The prioritisation of individual wealth, reflected in Etta et al.'s (2016) observations, directly undermined collective engagement in rituals, festivals, and mentorship networks, weakening the intergenerational transmission of tacit knowledge. Mcllwaine and Whiffrin (2001) and Sarkhel (2016) further reinforce this point, noting that knowledge embedded in the lived experience of elders is lost when communities become socially fragmented, echoing KH8's lament regarding the disappearance of pastoral learning.

Colonial intervention actively disrupted this knowledge system. KH1 recalled that African communities initially resisted plantation labour because "they used to have cows and goats and could not leave them" (Interview 1, 28 April 2025). In response, colonial authorities imposed regulations restricting livestock ownership, thereby dismantling subsistence-based self-sufficiency and compelling dependence on wage labour. The expansion of industrial sites, including the Plessislaer and Georgetown tanneries, further redefined social identity. KH7 observed, "Edendale people were initially not workers; they were farmers… After industry, the idea of a man changed: a man was someone who worked for a salary", and added, "the employer had more power than the chief" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025).

These narratives reflect Etta et al.'s (2016) and Mutamba's (2012) contention that capitalism reorients priorities toward individual wealth accumulation at the expense of communal ethics, while simultaneously diminishing moral and political authority grounded in African relational systems.

Temporal organisation was similarly transformed under industrial labour. KH5 noted, "Industry brought a new timetable: Monday to Friday, eight to five. So the old timetable was broken" (River of Life workshop, 30 September 2025), and KH4 observed, "When children started spending most of their time at school or going to work, these teachings started disappearing because there was no longer time for them" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). These disruptions curtailed the intergenerational mentorship that had structured daily life and the transmission of cultural knowledge. Etta et al. (2016) and Takoyoh (2007) provide complementary insights, linking wage labour and urban migration to the weakening of family-based socialisation and participation in communal rituals, which historically served as sites of tacit knowledge transfer.

Women's knowledge systems were equally affected. Homestead gardens, poultry rearing, and grain storage, once central to ecological learning and food sovereignty, were gradually abandoned. KH5 lamented, "People forgot their gardens, their chickens, their small farms" (River of Life workshop, 30 September 2025), highlighting the erosion of seed-saving practices, environmental knowledge, and intergenerational instruction. The development of institutional care facilities, such as "Old Age Homes", further separated elders from youth, compounding the breakdown of mentorship networks and the transmission of Indigenous knowledge (Etta et al., 2016; Mcllwaine & Whiffrin, 2001; Sarkhel, 2016).

Knowledge holders also articulate ambivalence regarding these changes. KH6 acknowledged that "Children had lots of chores before… herding, taking care of livestock, fetching water… The presence of taps and electricity meant life is easier" (Interview 1, 9 May 2025), recognising that industrial and technological changes offered material relief while simultaneously undermining epistemic continuity. KH4 further reflected that the YMCA, once a critical site for Western moral and practical guidance, declined post-apartheid: "The system of guidance… was destroyed when the new government came in", leaving "a generation of youth who are out of control" (Transect Walk, 30 September 2025). These accounts illustrate that the legacies of colonial and postcolonial policy maintain epistemic consequences that outlast formal colonial structures.

8.4.3 Biomedical marginalisation and the epistemic alienation of healing

The establishment of Western healthcare institutions, as recounted by knowledge holders, entrenched biomedical dominance, severing healing from its moral, spiritual, and ecological foundations within the integrated infrastructure described in Section 8.3. While Santos (2014) conceptualises systematic knowledge erasure as "epistemicide", knowledge holders' accounts reveal a more precise mechanism: epistemic displacement through moral stigmatisation. Missionary conversion framed African healing not merely as unscientific but as sinful, a distinction critical to understanding how delegitimisation operated effectively rather than empirically. KH2 and KH7 recount, through intergenerationally transmitted narratives, how missionaries burned traditional medicines and compelled converts to abandon ancestral practices as a condition of faith. This produced what Lebeau (2020) terms epistemic rupture not through clinical refutation but through sustained moral denigration that severed healing from its integration with mentorship (botanical transmission, Section 8.3.1), orality (diagnostic proverbs, Section 8.3.2), collective identity (wellbeing as communal achievement, Section 8.3.3), and spirituality (ancestral alignment as health prerequisite, Section 8.3.4).

This moral dimension extends Berkes and Folkes' (1993) argument about epistemic incompatibility. While Berkes and Folkes focus on structural mismatches between knowledge systems, Edendale testimonies reveal how biomedical dominance operated through affective violence—rendering Indigenous practices morally suspect rather than merely empirically inadequate. The consequence was not simple exclusion but internalised devaluation. KH4's observation that contemporary residents do not trust African ways because the continuity was broken (Interview 2, 28 August 2025) exposes how marginalisation produced epistemic alienation at the level of trust itself, communities taught to distrust their own knowledge systems. KH8 further laments that children have been socialised to regard ancestral remedies like *umhlonyane* as "dirty or unsafe" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025), resulting in a generation unfamiliar with preparation protocols and ethical frameworks governing healing practice. This internalisation exemplifies Gordon’s (2008) epistemic alienation while complicating policy literature that focuses narrowly on institutional integration: without restored continuity, formal recognition remains hollow.

Mgbeoji's (2006) critique of bioprospecting illuminates a parallel violence: Western research isolates bioactive compounds while discarding the spiritual and communal contexts that constitute healing as a relational practice, reducing holistic epistemology to an extractable commodity. Yet marginalisation was partial rather than absolute. During COVID-19,

knowledge holders reported the pragmatic reactivation of remedies like umhlonyane and umsuzwane when clinics were overwhelmed, demonstrating resilience and positioning AIKS as adaptive rather than nostalgic. KH7 affirms these practices as a scientific system operating "not via a laboratory" but through generational observation and communal verification (Interview 3, 18 September 2025), contesting positivist definitions of science. This extends Eyong's (2007) argument about internal logics of validation by showing that epistemic sovereignty operates under constraint: legitimacy derives from lived outcomes (recovery, restored harmony) rather than institutional certification. Critically, this resilience functioned despite the largely symbolic Traditional Health Practitioners Act (2004), affirming that epistemic agency persists through relational practice rather than state endorsement.

Accordingly, Section 8.4 demonstrates that these processes function as convergent technologies that collectively reconfigure the conditions of knowledge production. The straight line taught bodily submission to institutional authority; the factory timetable fragmented the agrarian rhythms that sustained mentorship; biomedical stigmatisation severed healing from its moral-spiritual foundations. Together, they dismantled the integrated epistemic infrastructure described in Section 8.3, not through eradication but through reorganisation of space, time, language, and bodily legitimacy. This analysis reframes epistemic violence as a multidimensional process targeting integration itself. Colonial modernity did not merely replace African knowledge with Western substitutes; it severed the relational architecture that bound mentorship, orality, identity, spirituality, and healing into a coherent whole precisely because this integration constituted an alternative mode of social ordering that located legitimacy within community networks rather than in external institutions. The contribution to knowledge lies in demonstrating how spatial, temporal, and bodily disciplines functioned as interlocking mechanisms: individually insufficient, collectively devastating in their convergence to dominate African consciousness by imposing Western rationalities as universal.

However, epistemic sovereignty persisted beneath dominant structures, not as an unbroken continuity but as a strategic reassembly. Biomedical marginalisation therefore exemplifies coloniality's enduring violence, demanding not just institutional inclusion but epistemic sovereignty over definitions of health and healing.

8.5 Socio-Cultural Fragmentation and the Crisis of Individualism

This crisis of individualism reflects the liftground's partial success in displacing communal ontologies (and relegating them to the underground) and the resulting rupture in the foreground, where negotiation gives way to dislocation. This section examines the lived consequences of that epistemic reordering. Interpreted through an Afrocentric lens, the impact extends beyond institutional change into the very fabric of personhood. The displacement of mentorship, moral regulation, and communal belonging ruptures the relational ground of African being, not as evidence of cultural failure, but as testimony to systemic epistemic violence. What emerges is not simply social change, but a deep socio-cultural dislocation marked by weakened intergenerational bonds, the erosion of collective responsibility, and a crisis of identity that knowledge holders describe as mental colonisation. These conditions signal not moral deficiency but the effects of epistemic abandonment, in which communities are taught to disengage from their own sources of knowledge, morality, and meaning.

This theme examines how the gradual breakdown of Indigenous social structures in Edendale has fostered fragmentation in family life, strained social relations, and a growing generational divide, alongside the rise of Western individualist values. It highlights how the erosion of shared moral authority has disrupted child-rearing practices, social regulation, and community cohesion, undermining resilience and a sense of belonging. The analysis, therefore, foregrounds four interconnected processes: the shift from collective responsibility to individualism, the decline of intergenerational respect, social decay manifesting in crime and substance abuse, and the loss of African identity through mental colonisation.

Together, these dynamics reveal an ongoing struggle to sustain Indigenous values within a social landscape reshaped by colonial modernity. Critically, this fragmentation is not inherent to African society but is produced through the systematic dismantling of relational epistemologies, a process that demands redress through rehumanisation, epistemic justice, and the restoration of Ubuntu as a living practice.

8.5.1 Breakdown of collective responsibility and the rise of individualism

Narratives from knowledge holders in Edendale point to a significant transformation in Indigenous social morality and communal accountability. Knowledge holders consistently

framed this shift not as moral decline, but as an epistemic reordering in which collective responsibility has been displaced by individualised logics of parenting, authority, and social obligation. The transition from communal child-rearing to privatised responsibility reflects the erosion of *Ubuntu*-based relationality under colonial, legal, and modern institutional arrangements that prioritise individual rights, nuclear family structures, and market rationality. This weakening of relational ethics corresponds with Wane's (2009) argument that communal solidarity historically sustained Indigenous Knowledge Systems by enabling shared moral authority, collective care, and intergenerational continuity.

In Edendale, the attenuation of this solidarity signals a rupture in both ethical and epistemic continuity. Historically, amongst the original inhabitants of the broader Edendale area, moral authority was distributed across the community, with elders collectively responsible for disciplining children and reinforcing social norms. This appears to have continued for many decades after the arrival of European settlers and the establishment of the mission station. Knowledge holders recalled a context in which any adult could correct a child's behaviour, and such intervention was reinforced rather than contested by parents (KH4; KH8, Interviews 2, May 2025). These accounts illustrate a moral order grounded in communal accountability rather than individual parental sovereignty, aligning with *Ubuntu* as a structuring principle of social life (Wane, 2009). By contrast, contemporary narratives describe increasing resistance to communal discipline, where parents invoke legal or personal boundaries to contest elder intervention (KH3, Interview 3, 24 September 2025). Inductively, this shift reflects the institutionalisation of individual rights frameworks that displace intergenerational responsibility and weaken collective moral regulation.

The consequences of this epistemic shift extend beyond discipline to identity formation and cultural continuity. Knowledge holders linked communal child-rearing to the transmission of lineage, values, and relational knowledge, including *izithakazelo* and collective work practices (KH6, Interview 2, 4 September 2025). As communal authority diminishes, knowledge holders observe a growing disconnect between youth and elders, with younger generations increasingly questioning or rejecting elders' guidance (KH5, Interview 2, 28 August 2025). Within these narratives, references to "fear" do not connote coercion but rather reverence and recognition of communal moral authority. Inductively, the data suggest that the weakening of relational knowledge transmission is driven less by generational change than by epistemic displacement that reframes authority as individual rather than communal.
Education emerges ambivalently within this process. Some knowledge holders described

formal schooling as a substitute moral framework, particularly in contexts where communal discipline has declined (KH7, Interview 3, 18 September 2025). Others qualified this view, emphasising that education divorced from respect and relational ethics fails to cultivate responsible social actors (KH4, Interview 2, 9 May 2025). These accounts indicate that literacy and certification alone cannot replace the moral and pedagogical functions historically embedded within communal structures; quite apart from the inherently violent effects of the Western schooling system, as discussed above.

The decline of intermediary institutions further intensified this vacuum. Knowledge holders identified organisations such as the YMCA as hybrid moral infrastructures that once provided discipline, mentorship, and a sense of collective belonging. While the YMCA was a profoundly Western institution rooted in Christian and colonial moral frameworks, knowledge holders described how it became locally embedded, shaping youth behaviour and reinforcing communal values through structured activities, guidance, and social support. This reflects not the continuity of AIKS within the institution itself, but how community members appropriated and reinterpreted such spaces within hybrid moral landscapes (KH4, Transect Walk, 30 September 2025; KH1, Interview 1, 6 May 2025). Their subsequent deterioration, attributed to post-apartheid institutional neglect, has left many young people without alternative sites of moral formation. Knowledge holders linked this absence to rising substance abuse, theft, and social disorder (KH2, Interview 2, 9 May 2025). These observations resonate with Mcllwaine and Whiffrin (2001) and Sarkhel (2016), who argue that the physical and social separation of youth from elders disrupts the transmission of experiential wisdom and collective memory. Tragic incidents described by knowledge holders, including substance-related violence and fatal accidents involving youth, were framed not as evidence of inherent delinquency but as symptoms of structural abandonment within a township historically organised around labour extraction rather than social reproduction (KH3; KH5, Interviews 3, September 2025; Delius, 2007; Mafeje, 1971). Inductively, these accounts locate social instability within the erosion of relational infrastructures rather than individual moral failure.

Shifts in family structure and land relations further contribute to the breakdown of collective accountability. Knowledge holders observed the fragmentation of extended households and the dissolution of polygynous or multigenerational living arrangements, often linked to jealousy, economic pressures, and shifting aspirations (KH4, Transect Walk, 30 September 2025). Similarly, land once managed under precolonial norms collectively has increasingly

been commodified, with families selling plots to pursue monetary gain (KH4, Transect Walk, 30 September 2025). Etta et al. (2016) and Mutamba (2012) associate such transitions with capitalist individualism, noting that prioritisation of personal accumulation undermines communal rituals, shared labour, and intergenerational knowledge exchange.

As I discuss in much more detail below, read inductively through the learning–unlearning–relearning framework, these patterns reveal a layered epistemic process. Learning occurred as individualism and rights-based frameworks were normalised, and collective responsibility was devalued. Unlearning emerges as knowledge holders critically name this shift as historically produced rather than inevitable. Relearning is evident in contemporary efforts to revive sports programmes, restore elder–youth dialogue, and reclaim *izithakazelo* as living repositories of communal knowledge. The crisis in Edendale is therefore not one of defective youth or failed families, but of weakened relational infrastructures. However, communal memory persists. The enduring invocation of the proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" signals not nostalgia. However, a blueprint for reconstituting collective responsibility. Recentering *Ubuntu* affirms that rehumanisation begins with relational presence, shared accountability, and the recognition that child-rearing is not the burden of a single household, but a collective ethical obligation (Wane, 2009).

8.5.2 Erosion of intergenerational respect

The diminishing respect for elders in Edendale aligns with Mosweunyane's (2013) and Idang's (2015) observations that elders historically served as custodians of culture and tradition, responsible for guiding moral, social, and ecological life. Knowledge holder narratives reveal that this authority has been undermined by the privileging of Western knowledge systems, formal education, and technological fluency, leading to what Hoppers (2002) describes as a loss of cultural reference points. For instance, KH8's remark that children assert "We are educated" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025) exemplifies how Western schooling is internalised as epistemic superiority, effectively displacing elder authority. Similarly, KH4 highlights the technological inversion of knowledge, noting that "With this technology, we no longer know anything; it is they who now know more than us" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025), which mirrors the literature's concern that African epistemologies are often devalued in favour of Eurocentric benchmarks.

The data further illustrate Hoppers' (2002) argument that the breakdown of Indigenous Knowledge Systems contributes to a broader societal dislocation. KH5 observes that youth

may instruct elders in digital tools but remain “lost in how to behave, who they are, and what the rules are” (Interview 2, 9 May 2025), indicating a disjunction between technical competence and moral formation, a core function traditionally facilitated by elders. KH7 reinforces this point by linking Western education directly to cultural erosion: “Western education colonised our minds… children are more Eurocentric, thinking like whites, and their culture and respect disappear when taught white supremacist ways” (Interview 2, 26 May 2025).

Taken together, the Edendale data not only confirm the literature but expand it inductively. While Mosweunyane, Idang, and Hoppers describe the erosion of elder authority as a structural phenomenon, the lived experiences of knowledge holders reveal the nuanced mechanisms of epistemic displacement, schooling, technology, linguistic hierarchies, and family fragmentation through which intergenerational respect is actively contested and, in some cases, strategically resisted. This inductive insight foregrounds the ongoing potential for relearning and epistemic repair, as elders and communities work to restore *Seriti* and intergenerational relationality within a context shaped by coloniality and modernity.

8.5.3 Social decay: drugs, liquor, and crime

Substance abuse emerges not as an individual moral failure but as a symptom of epistemic rupture: the collapse of communal moral regulation previously embedded in mentorship economies (Section 8.3.1) and spatial arrangements (Section 8.3.3). When relational infrastructures fragment, youth navigate social life without the epistemic frameworks that historically calibrated conduct, producing what KH4 terms 'lostness' rather than delinquency. Knowledge holders describe daily alcohol consumption and widespread drug use among youth, linking these practices to theft, violence, and disrespectful behaviour. Alcohol is repeatedly identified as intensifying aggression and contributing to gender-based violence, suggesting that substance use is both a catalyst for harmful acts and a manifestation of broader social instability.

Rather than being described as recreational or incidental, drinking and drug use are portrayed as embedded within everyday youth life, shaping how young people relate to others and interpret acceptable behaviour. The consequences of this normalisation are illustrated through concrete events. KH7’s account of a bus hijacking incident, in which intoxicated students demanded transport to a shebeen and a learner was ultimately killed (Interview 3, 5 September 2025), is referenced as emblematic of how substance use, peer dynamics, and

absent discipline converge with fatal outcomes. In narrating this event, knowledge holders emphasise not criminal intent but the absence of restraint, guidance, and authority. Such incidents are understood as collective failures, revealing environments where no effective structures intervene to redirect or regulate youth behaviour.

Alongside substance use, the dismantling of mentorship and communal institutions is identified as a critical factor in the moral disorder affecting youth. Knowledge holders repeatedly refer to the YMCA as a former anchor of discipline, moral guidance, and collective belonging. However, as suggested above, such institutions cannot be understood as neutral spaces of community formation; they were instruments of colonial modernity, Western in origin, Christian in ethos, and structured around moral binaries that often marginalised Indigenous epistemologies. Drawing on Rule and John's (2011) framework, the YMCA functioned as a liftground apparatus: it provided social cohesion and youth mentorship while simultaneously elevating Eurocentric norms and displacing African Indigenous frameworks of moral development and communal accountability. Despite their embeddedness in colonial and Western frameworks, knowledge holders also recognise that participation in YMCA programmes instilled discipline and social responsibility, illustrating the complex and sometimes contradictory legacies of such institutions.

Those who grew up under its programmes are remembered as having internalised respect, responsibility, and accountability through participation in structured activities and adult supervision. Its decline after apartheid is described as leaving a void, with no equivalent institution replacing its role in shaping youth conduct. This absence is not framed nostalgically but diagnostically, as elders contrast past forms of guided socialisation with the present lack of moral scaffolding. Similarly, changes in family structure and intergenerational relations are described as intensifying youth vulnerability. Knowledge holders point to the fragmentation of extended households, the dispersal of elders, and the erosion of intergenerational authority as contributing to moral instability. Migration driven by conflict, employment, and post-1994 urban mobility has produced households where youth are often unsupervised or disconnected from elder guidance. In this context, young people are described as navigating social life without consistent moral reference points, relying instead on peer norms shaped by substance use and survival pressures.

Economic and political conditions further compound these dynamics. Knowledge holders note that poverty, unemployment, and economic leakage undermine household stability and communal investment. Social grants, while necessary, are described as flowing out of the

community almost immediately, thereby limiting their capacity to sustain social cohesion. These material conditions are understood to weaken the social environments in which moral learning occurs, leaving youth exposed to risk without protective communal structures. Comprehensibly, a learning–unlearning–relearning trajectory becomes visible through these accounts. Learning occurs as youth grow up within conditions where substance use, individual survival, and behavioural permissiveness are normalised in the absence of communal oversight. Unlearning is evident in how knowledge holders actively reject explanations that blame youth character or morality, instead naming structural neglect, institutional collapse, and epistemic displacement as the root causes of disorder. Relearning emerges in elders' calls to revive mentorship, re-establish structured youth activities, and restore intergenerational dialogue as foundations for moral regeneration.

From the narratives of knowledge holders, the data show that substance abuse, crime, and social disorder in Edendale are understood as consequences of weakened relational infrastructures rather than individual failure. Knowledge holders locate the crisis within the erosion of communal moral regulation, the disappearance of mentorship institutions, and the fragmentation of Indigenous systems of guidance. Their narratives affirm that ethical life is produced collectively and that restoring moral order requires rebuilding the relational, institutional, and intergenerational foundations through which accountability and social responsibility are learned.

8.5.4 Loss of African Identity and Mental Colonisation

Knowledge holder reflections present the erosion of African identity in Edendale as an active and systematic process of epistemic dispossession rooted in mental colonisation. Knowledge holders describe how Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and governing were reclassified as inferior, backward, or shameful through missionary doctrine, colonial schooling, linguistic hierarchies, and the restructuring of everyday life. This process resonates with Higgs' (2011) argument that colonialism did not merely dominate African bodies and territories. Still, reordered African consciousness itself, producing an "inverted" identity in which African self-understanding became a distorted reflection of Eurocentric norms. What emerges from the data is a condition in which communities remain physically located on ancestral land while becoming psychologically alienated from their epistemic foundations, a condition Césaire (1995) described as societies being "drained of their essence" through ideological violence.

This dislocation is articulated most explicitly by KH4, who reflects that abandoning Indigenous frameworks resulted in a collective loss of orientation rather than progress: "The biggest mistake we made as Black people is that we abandoned what was ours… Now we are lost" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). His reflection speaks directly to what Kodjo (1987) describes as the African condition of being "torn away from the past" and forced to inhabit a world structured by external reference points, producing what he terms a "deformed image of others". Similarly, KH7 distinguishes between the instrumental benefits of Western education and its deeper cognitive consequences, observing that while it facilitated academic advancement, it simultaneously produced mental domination, leaving Africans "mentally imprisoned while physically free" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025). This experiential account mirrors Fanon's (1963) argument that colonialism sought to "empty the native's brain of all form and content" (p. 169), not only by distorting history, but by cultivating internalised inferiority.

Language emerges inductively as a central mechanism through which this epistemic emptying was enacted. Knowledge holders describe how English came to function as a marker of intelligence, authority, and modernity, while isiZulu was associated with backwardness. This linguistic hierarchy did not simply marginalise African languages; it undermined the epistemic authority of elders, whose knowledge was rendered invisible because it was not articulated in the coloniser's tongue. KH7 notes that children's preference for English "took away the dignity of the elders", not because elders lacked knowledge, but because the criteria for legitimacy had been externally imposed (Interview 3, 18 September 2025). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) argument that language carries culture and conceptual frameworks is instructive here: the dominance of colonial languages did not merely replace words, but reordered reality itself, reinforcing what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) describes as the denial of African "epistemic virtue".

Cultural expressions such as dress, architecture, and storytelling were similarly affected. Knowledge holders explain that when traditional attire disappeared, the epistemic meanings embedded within it also faded. As KH8 observes, "when the clothing disappeared, the knowledge behind the clothing disappeared with it" (Interview 2, 12 May 2025). This reflects a broader pattern identified by Comaroff and Comaroff (1991), who argue that missionary modernity reorganised African subjectivity by disciplining everyday practices and material culture. Storytelling, once central to moral education and historical consciousness, was gradually displaced by television and digital media that privilege external narratives and

temporalities. Even communal identity was reframed, as Edendale came to be known as *esemakholweni* ("among the believers"), a designation that foregrounded Christian affiliation while displacing Zulu political and spiritual lineages. These renamings signal what Mignolo (2007) terms epistemicide: the silencing of Indigenous meaning-making systems to sustain Western epistemic dominance.

Missionary influence further entrenched epistemic dependency. Knowledge holders describe how communities increasingly sought validation from churches and external institutions, fostering a reliance on outsiders for moral, spiritual, and intellectual authority. This orientation reflects what Santos (2014) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) describe as the coloniality of knowledge, in which postcolonial societies continue to privilege Western frameworks as universal while African knowledge remains localised and devalued. The marginalisation of African medicine compounded this rupture, severing embodied relationships with land, ecology, and ancestral accountability, and reinforcing the belief that legitimate knowledge must originate outside African systems.

Despite these profound disruptions, knowledge holders do not portray African identity as erased. Instead, they articulate deliberate acts of resistance and renewal. KH7 emphasises that learning other languages or systems is not inherently problematic, but becomes destructive when it requires the erasure of one's origins: "There is nothing wrong with learning other languages, but you must not forget your background. You must be proud of who you are" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025). This position aligns with Chinweizu's (1985) call to dismantle the "enslaved person mentality" through conscious epistemic recentering rather than cultural isolation. Importantly, knowledge holders resist simplistic binaries that position African knowledge as static and Western knowledge as progressive. KH3 challenges deficit narratives by asserting that African societies were not frozen in time but were already dynamic and evolving prior to colonial intervention: "I would not say that without the Western way Black people would be backward… We were also evolving" (Interview 3, 28 August 2025). This challenges colonial narratives identified by Memmi (1963), which portrayed Africa as a "negative other" to legitimise domination. Instead, identity emerges inductively as adaptive, relational, and historically grounded.

Viewed through the learning–unlearning–relearning framework, these narratives reveal a layered process of mental colonisation and decolonial recovery. Learning occurred as colonial hierarchies were internalised, equating intelligence with English fluency and progress with epistemic abandonment. Unlearning unfolds as knowledge holders recognise this

conditioning as historically produced rather than natural, echoing Fanon's insistence that decolonisation must be both material and psychological. Relearning is evident in intentional practices of recentering—reviving storytelling, teaching *izithakazelo*, affirming isiZulu in the home, and asserting African consciousness as a valid ground of knowledge.

The struggle over identity in Edendale is therefore not about returning to a romanticised past, but about reclaiming the right to self-definition in the present. It is a decolonial project that affirms African people as epistemic agents rather than passive recipients of civilisation. As Quijano (2000) and Maldonado-Torres (2007) argue, coloniality persists beyond colonialism; resisting it requires restoring African consciousness as the grounding of being, belonging, and becoming. In this context, every act of cultural transmission, linguistic, moral, or historical, functions as rehumanisation. While the map of knowledge may have been imposed, the terrain of memory endures, within which the compass of self continues to orient toward wholeness. This is precisely why mental colonisation matters: it reveals that decoloniality must go beyond epistemic justice, since recognition alone cannot repair consciousness fractured by centuries of epistemic violence.

8.6 Resilience, Syncretism, and the Call to Relearn

To conclude this analysis solely in terms of rupture would be analytically reductive, overlooking a dimension equally present in the Chapter Seven data: the persistent, adaptive ways knowledge holders navigated colonial imposition without ontological surrender. Yet to frame this persistence as triumphant resilience alone would equally distort the record, obscuring the irreversible losses documented in Section 8.5, the severed botanical vocabularies, the graves paved over with tarmac, the elders who internalised missionary condemnations of ancestral practice. The Edendale narratives demand a dialectical reading that holds rupture and adaptation in productive tension, recognising that epistemic agency operated within constraint rather than beyond it. This section, therefore, examines three interrelated phenomena that resist singular narratives of either erasure or endurance: (1) strategic syncretism as epistemic navigation rather than cultural compromise; (2) the selective validation of Indigenous medicine amid institutional marginalisation; and (3) the contemporary call to "return to roots" not as nostalgic restoration but as ethically grounded reclamation that acknowledges both continuity and irrevocable loss. In doing so, the analysis advances the decolonial project articulated in Chapter Two: not the recovery of cultural

purity, but the reassertion of African epistemic sovereignty within historically conditioned realities, a necessary step toward epistemic justice and the rehumanisation of knowledge systems long devalued under colonial modernity.

8.6.1 Persistence through syncretism (doing both)

Practices described by knowledge holders as “doing both” emerge as a central mechanism through which African epistemic life has persisted in Edendale. Attending church while honouring *amadlozi*, consulting clinics while preparing *umhlonyane*, or combining Christian rites with ancestral rituals are not experienced as contradictions. Rather, knowledge holders describe these practices as deliberate survival strategies that sustain African cosmology within externally imposed religious and institutional frameworks. In contrast to missionary binaries that demanded exclusive allegiance, communities navigated multiple systems with discernment and intentionality. As KH4 succinctly explains, “For most Black people it’s not easy to get rid of our rituals and culture, but we practice both” (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). Syncretism here reflects agency rather than dilution. This empirical finding aligns with Mkhize's (2015) and Gwala’s (2019) arguments that Edendale’s identity was never fixed but continuously negotiated at the intersection of African kinship ethics, Christian moral imperatives, and colonial legal regimes. Rather than replacing one system with another, residents learned to inhabit multiple moral and epistemic positions simultaneously. The data affirm this historical continuity, demonstrating that “doing both” is not a contemporary improvisation, but a long-standing mode of cultural navigation through which African social life remained intelligible under colonial constraint.

Across oral histories and participatory methods, knowledge holders described syncretism as both protective and transmissive. Christianity was often adopted outwardly, while ancestral obligations were quietly maintained within households. Elders who identified as Christian nevertheless continued ritual slaughter, maintained the *umsamo*, and upheld ancestral remembrance, ensuring that lineage, morality, and spiritual accountability were not severed by conversion. These practices reflect how knowledge holders navigate Western institutional forms and selectively adopt elements that support communal cohesion while striving to preserve core relational epistemologies. This perspective resonates with Meintjes’ (2020) analysis of Edendale as a site of deliberate epistemic reconfiguration, where Western institutional forms were selectively adopted while core relational epistemologies were

preserved. Syncretism thus functioned as a cultural shield, allowing African knowledge systems to endure without confrontation with dominant power structures.

Knowledge holders also articulated a cosmological logic underpinning this coexistence. Ancestors were not understood as rivals to God, but as mediators within a layered spiritual order. As KH8 explains, "I believe in God through the ancestors… I must burn *impepho* and call on the elders, the ancestors, and speak with them" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025). This layered understanding illustrates that "doing both" is internally coherent within African cosmology, even when externally framed as theological inconsistency. Rather than signalling confusion, the data point to a sophisticated spiritual grammar capable of holding multiple registers of meaning at once. Syncretism extended beyond spirituality into everyday social life. Marriage practices routinely combined *lobola* with church weddings, while families participated in Christian worship alongside Indigenous brewing, music, and communal labour practices. These adaptations demonstrate what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Gqola (2015) describe as epistemic resilience: the capacity of Indigenous systems to animate externally imposed forms using African ethical logics of reciprocity, stewardship, and relational accountability. The persistence of African social values amid altered material conditions confirms that adaptation did not entail epistemic loss.

However, knowledge holders also emphasised that syncretism was neither uncontested nor static. The rise of born-again and evangelical churches introduced renewed pressures to abandon ancestral practices, which were increasingly labelled as "demonic". Knowledge holders expressed concern that these rigid moral boundaries intensified family conflict and accelerated cultural erosion. KH3's rejection of the claim that ancestral rituals could be equated with evil spirits (Interview 3, 28 August 2025) reflects an ongoing struggle over epistemic legitimacy, revealing how colonial logics of spiritual purity continue to be reproduced within post-missionary Christianity. In response, African epistemic systems adapted rather than retreated. Gendered ritual roles became more flexible, particularly where men were absent or unwilling to perform ancestral duties. As KH8 notes, "a woman can burn *impepho*" when necessary (Interview 2, 22 May 2025). This flexibility underscores that continuity within African knowledge systems is maintained through responsibility and relational obligation rather than rigid adherence to form. In this sense, syncretism thus functioned as everyday decolonial praxis, refusing colonial either/or logics while affirming African cosmology as the interpretive centre. This underground persistence during colonial learning created the epistemic substrate later activated in unlearning

8.6.2 Resilience and validation of indigenous medicine

The data indicate that AIM in Edendale persists and continues to produce effective healing outcomes. Knowledge holders **contest** representations of Indigenous medicine as superstition or anachronistic practice, instead framing it as a system empirically validated through sustained experiential application. AIM is frequently relied upon when illnesses are persistent, when access to clinics is limited, or when biomedical interventions fail to address perceived root causes of illness, underscoring its continued practical relevance and resilience. This understanding is articulated clearly by KH7, who states: "African medicine is also science… the only difference is that it is not via a laboratory" (Interview 2, 6 May 2025). For knowledge holders, scientific legitimacy is established through generational observation, communal verification, and embodied outcomes rather than institutional testing. Healing is validated when people recover and when harmony is restored between body, conduct, and environment. This framing resonates with Odora Hoppers' (2002) argument that AIKS are living, creative systems used to interpret and transform reality rather than residual memories of a pre-modern past.

Experiential validation features prominently in knowledge holder narratives. KH7 recounts how a friend spent large sums on hospital treatment without improvement, only to recover with an affordable, accessible African remedy (Interview 3, 5 September 2025). Such accounts are not presented as exceptional, but as familiar experiences within the community. These forms of collective verification reflect what Dei (2012) describes as knowledge validated by social efficacy rather than by abstraction, in which credibility is established through lived outcomes. Beyond efficacy, knowledge holders emphasise that Indigenous healing is inseparable from moral and spiritual accountability. KH1 explains that treatment often requires discipline, abstinence, dietary regulation, and adherence to ritual instructions linking healing to ethical conduct (Interview 1, 6 May 2025). Similarly, knowledge holders associate rising illness among youth with the abandonment of Indigenous diets and practices. In this framing, healing extends beyond symptom management to the restoration of balance within the self and the community. This aligns with Lebeau's (2020) observation that Indigenous healing knowledge is validated through humility, ancestral reverence, and accountability to communal well-being.

Knowledge holders also locate AIM within land and ecology. KH1 notes that effective healing depends on access to specific trees, rivers, and sacred spaces, many of which have disappeared due to development (Interview 3, 5 September 2025). The loss of these spaces is

experienced as a disruption to healing knowledge itself. However, adaptability is also evident. During the COVID-19 pandemic, communities returned to remedies such as *umhlonyane* and *umsuzwane* when clinics were overwhelmed. As KH7 reflects, “People were brainwashed to believe otherwise, but both help heal” (Interview 2, 22 May 2025). This adaptive return reflects what Santos (2018) conceptualises as epistemic resilience, the capacity of marginalised knowledge systems to reassert relevance under conditions of domination.

8.6.3 The call to “return to roots” and restore culture

The call to "re-centre roots" articulated by Edendale's knowledge holders functions as an epistemic reorientation rather than a temporal regression. Knowledge holders explicitly acknowledge irreversible loss, paved-over graves, severed botanical vocabularies, and fragmented households, yet insist that what remains demands active reclamation. KH7 articulates this tension with urgency: "We adopted what belongs to other nations. Now we are lost… We must re-centre our roots… Without that, this nation will collapse" (Interview 3, 18 July 2025). Crucially, recentering does not presume intact archives; it operates from fragments preserved underground, forging innovative continuity within historically conditioned constraints. This stance anticipates the critical realism developed in Section 8.11: some roots have been uprooted beyond recovery, yet epistemic agency persists through creative reconstruction grounded in what remains. KH2 emphasises that African people cannot fully exist without their culture (Interview 2, 29 May 2025), while KH4 stresses the need for youth to know their *izithakazelo*, origins, and communal responsibilities (Interview 2, 12 May 2025).

In these accounts, culture is not ornamental but constitutive of personhood and social order. This aligns with Asante's (2009) assertion that epistemic recentering requires engaging African knowledge from within its own historical and cultural frames, positioning Africa as the centre of analysis rather than a peripheral object. Recentering is enacted through pragmatic interventions that reassemble fragments within present constraints. KH7 recalls the YMCA's role in offering boxing, karate, and ballroom dancing as structured pathways for discipline and belonging (Interview 3, 18 September 2025), not as restoration of precolonial forms, but as adaptive reconfiguration of relational pedagogy. As discussed above, though Christian and colonial in origin, the YMCA was tactically inhabited by Edendale residents to sustain social cohesion, even as it remained embedded in epistemic structures that historically devalued African knowledge systems. KH3 advocates for community centres, arts initiatives,

and local economic projects that embed Indigenous ethics within contemporary frameworks (Interview 3, 28 August 2025). Cultural education days centred on Princess Magogo's compositions exemplify this approach: songs function not as museum pieces but as living vessels encoding ethical discernment for present crises (River of Life workshop, 30 October 2025). These initiatives demonstrate Dei's (2012) epistemic resilience: knowledge holders actively rearticulate the relevance of Indigenous knowledge to contemporary social realities. Knowledge holders also emphasise the grounding of culture in place. Family graves serve as sites of intergenerational dialogue and belonging, as noted by KH6 during the transect walk (Transect Walk, 30 October 2025). Oral documentation is proposed not to replace direct transmission but to supplement it amid disruptions to schooling and migration (KH6, Interview 2, 4 September 2025). KH4 insists that restoration must begin within households, arguing that institutions cannot compensate for cultural absence in the home (Interview 2, 24 May 2025), reflecting Mazama's (2003) view that reconnecting knowledge with its spiritual, ancestral, and moral purposes restores coherence to African thought fragmented by coloniality. Knowledge holders are also acutely aware of structural constraints. Urbanisation fragments extended families, land scarcity limits burial practices, and legal and social shifts complicate traditional discipline. KH3 observes, "In the past, grandparents lived with families and imparted knowledge. Today, parents move away… children lack guidance" (River of Life workshop, 30 October 2025). Alcohol use and alienation further hinder youth engagement. These realities temper optimism without diminishing agency.

The movement to restore culture is itself an act of unlearning and relearning. Knowledge holders reject narratives that attribute social breakdown solely to moral deficiency, instead recognising coloniality and modern pressures as causal. Relearning is evident in practices such as teaching *izithakazelo*, reviving *izinganekwane*, tending graves, and singing Princess Magogo's songs as lived knowledge. This forward-looking engagement mirrors Odora Hoppers' (2002) framing of Indigenous knowledge as a dynamic framework for generating new knowledge rather than merely documenting inherited traditions. Through the lens of the learning–unlearning–relearning framework, restoration is visible as a layered process: learning occurred as Western norms were internalised as "progress"; unlearning emerged through recognition of the resulting moral and epistemic vacuums; relearning is enacted through culturally grounded pedagogies and everyday practices. In this way, the call to return to roots is neither static nor nostalgic.

It mobilises African cosmological ethics as a resource to address contemporary crises. Rehumanisation in Edendale begins with recentering Indigenous knowledge as the foundation of collective healing, identity, and self-determined futures. As KH2 summarises, “Without knowing who you are and where you come from, you cannot build for tomorrow” (Interview 2, 12 May 2025). Culture is affirmed not as heritage to be preserved, but as an epistemic resource for renewal. This aligns with Mkhize's (2015) and Meintjes's (2020) observations that historical efforts to blend Christian ethics with African relationality exemplify early acts of epistemic agency, in which communities actively negotiated faith and culture on their own terms. Seen in this light, the call to "re-centre roots" operates as decolonial praxis - reclaiming epistemic sovereignty not through temporal return to pristine origins (impossible after irreversible rupture), but through forward-looking regeneration grounded in fragments preserved underground. This aligns with Mignolo's (2011) assertion that decolonisation builds anew from fragments rather than restoring intact archives, a stance ethically grounded in the critical realism developed in Section 8.11.

8.7 Deductive Analysis: The LUR Triad as Afrocentric Theoretical Lens

This section deploys the learning–unlearning–relearning (LUR) triad as an Afrocentric theoretical lens to interpret epistemic transformation in Edendale. Grounded in the African epistemological foundations outlined in Chapter Four, including *Ubuntu*, ancestral relationality, and decolonial critique, the triad operates not as a linear sequence but as a recursive and interconnected process through which participants negotiate Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. Rather than prescribing a fixed analytical template, the LUR framework provides a conceptual orientation for interpreting salient patterns that emerged from the data. Its application is therefore guided by the empirical narratives themselves, while remaining attentive to the historical, cultural, and contextual complexities that shape participants' experiences. In this way, the framework illuminates dimensions of epistemic transformation without precluding alternative readings or reducing the richness of participants' accounts to a single explanatory logic. The analysis delineates a four-stage movement: Indigenous learning (precolonial epistemic sovereignty), colonial learning (epistemic displacement), unlearning (critical rupture), and relearning (relational reconstruction). Significantly, the term learning within the triad denotes the second stage of colonial epistemic displacement, understood as the internalised effect of a systemic process

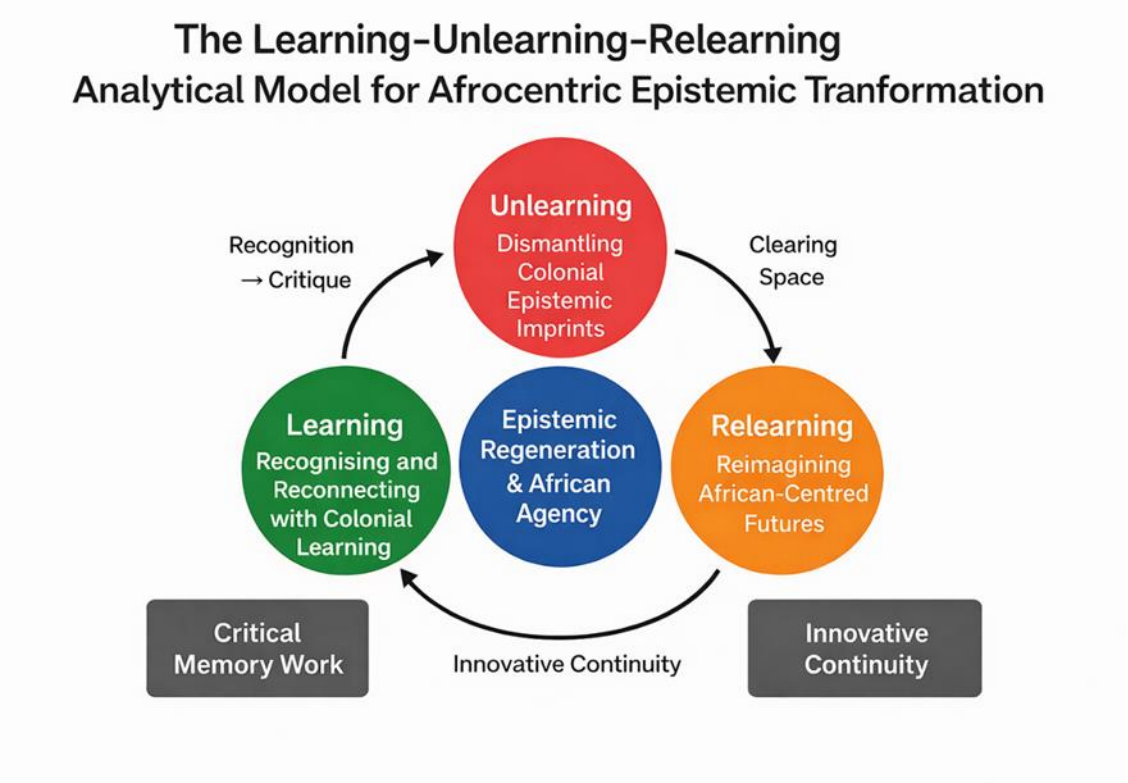
of colonial education. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) contends, this education was not merely instructional but constituted a form of epistemic violence aimed at severing African subjects from their ontological and linguistic foundations. Colonial learning, therefore, should not be read as a parallel to Indigenous pedagogy, but as its intentional replacement through institutionalised alienation, fundamentally distinct from Indigenous learning, which is relational, moral, and grounded in communal life.

Consistent with Afrocentric methodology (Reviere, 2001), the triad functions as a sensitising framework rather than a mechanical imposition, serving to identify patterned expressions of epistemic transformation whilst maintaining accountability to community meaning through *ukweli* (truth grounded in communal experience) and member checking. Rule and John's (2011) four-dimensional context framework is employed auxiliarily to situate these processes within layered realities: background (historical structures operating at temporal distance yet formative to the case), foreground (daily lived experience, shaped by historical background, but also by existing institutions and liftground discourse), liftground (the dominant publicly legitimised discourse, specifically in this context Western Knowledge Systems, which establishes epistemic legitimacy through selective emphasis, strategic omission, and institutional authority), and underground (submerged ontological commitments persisting beneath dominant structures). Crucially, conflating spatial simultaneity (Rule and John) with temporal recursion (LUR) constitutes a category error. The triad remains the analytical driver; Rule and John illuminate how underground persistence operated concurrently with liftground dominance during colonial learning, thereby enabling rupture rather than awaiting it.

This approach advances decolonial scholarship by refusing both romanticised resilience and totalising rupture. Colonial learning enacted displacement whilst underground knowledge persisted simultaneously. Unlearning emerged as a critical rupture precisely because subaltern knowledge survived beneath dominant structures. Relearning manifests as relational reconstruction wherein fragments preserved underground are creatively reassembled within present constraints. Critical realism acknowledges irreversible loss without surrendering agency, rejecting the false binary between total epistemicide and seamless continuity.

The following sections apply this Afrocentric lens: Section 8.8 analyses colonial learning as displacement; Section 8.9 examines unlearning as rupture enabled by underground persistence; Section 8.10 explores relearning as relational reconstruction; Section 8.11 introduces critical realism within the LUR framework. Together, they demonstrate how epistemic transformation unfolds as recursive movement through which African people

restore themselves as subjects of knowledge operating not through pristine restoration but through innovative continuity grounded in fragments preserved underground.



8.8 Colonial learning as epistemic displacement (LUR lens)

Within the LUR triad, colonial learning signifies a phase of epistemic displacement characterised by the institutional production and internalisation of epistemic inferiority. This process did not operate at the level of abstract ideology alone, but was enacted through material and organisational practices that restructured the background conditions of knowledge, even as Indigenous epistemologies continued to operate beneath the surface. Mission schools, land titling regimes, and church governance functioned as foreground mechanisms through which epistemic hierarchy was normalised, elevating Western knowledge as universal and authoritative while relegating Indigenous knowledge to the status of the primitive and residual.

Land dispossession was central to this displacement, as it fractured the ontological relationship between knowledge and place. By severing access to land, colonial regimes undermined land-based pedagogies that had sustained Indigenous epistemologies across generations. This was particularly evident among Allison's followers, who were repeatedly

displaced in the period leading up to their arrival at Edendale. Mission schooling compounded this rupture through linguistic alienation, institutionalising English as the sole medium of legitimate knowledge and enforcing its dominance through punitive measures against isiZulu usage. While Wa Thiong'o's (1986) notion of the "colonisation of the mind" captures this dynamic, the Edendale data extend the concept by demonstrating that alienation operated not only through prohibition but through incentive structures. Children who adopted English accrued social recognition and proximity to missionary authority, rendering linguistic assimilation a pathway to legitimacy. KH1's recollection of punishment for the use of isiZulu during the day, alongside elders' continued oral transmission after dusk, illustrates how displacement reordered epistemic legitimacy without affecting total erasure. This simultaneity liftground dominance coexisting with underground persistence—is analytically illuminated by Rule and John's (2011) spatial framework, though its temporal unfolding is more fully accounted for within the LUR triad.

Church institutions further reconfigured spiritual epistemologies by positioning Christian cosmology as the singular truth and recasting ancestral veneration as demonic. While Mbiti (1969) argues that missionary Christianity rendered African cosmologies partial and deficient, the Edendale narratives introduce a critical nuance: spiritual displacement was met with strategic compartmentalisation rather than wholesale abandonment, at least among those who settled there after the mission station's founding. Knowledge holders described attending church during the day while maintaining the *umsamo* at night, indicating that underground epistemic continuity was sustained even during colonial education/learning. This persistence did not emerge after displacement, but functioned concurrently as the latent foundation upon which unlearning would later become possible.

Temporal reorganisation under industrial capitalism intensified these epistemic shifts by altering the rhythms through which knowledge had traditionally been transmitted. KH8's observation that "when the factories came, everything changed… young boys were no longer staying with the men to learn" captures how linear, wage-based temporality disrupted seasonal cycles, evening storytelling, and embodied mentorship. Knowledge transmission was thus reconfigured from a relational and communal process into an activity subordinated to labour time and economic productivity, with the school becoming the central institutional site through which learning was reordered, disciplined, and calibrated to colonial labour imperatives.

This extends Mafeje's (1971) analysis of epistemic deskilling under extractive capitalism by demonstrating that temporal reordering functioned not only economically, but pedagogically.

In Santos' (2014) terms, this process constitutes epistemic violence by producing absences, rendering Indigenous knowledges unintelligible within dominant epistemic frameworks. However, the Edendale data reveal that this violence was selective rather than absolute. Certain forms of Indigenous knowledge, such as agricultural practices or midwifery, were appropriated for colonial utility, even as their epistemic foundations were denied legitimacy. This selective incorporation deepened displacement by abstracting knowledge from its ethical, spiritual, and cosmological grounding, a nuance that extends Santos' broader formulation.

Colonial education thus created the conditions under which processes of unlearning could emerge. By positioning African people as objects of knowledge rather than epistemic subjects—recipients of civilisation rather than bearers of epistemic sovereignty colonial institutions fostered forms of epistemic alienation that many knowledge holders later questioned, negotiated, and, in some cases, consciously resisted. Within the LUR triad, this phase is therefore not an endpoint but a necessary moment in the temporal movement toward epistemic recovery and transformation.

8.9 Unlearning as Critical Rupture (LUR Lens)

Unlearning within the LUR triad denotes a critical rupture moment when internalised colonial hierarchies are named, interrogated, and refused. The data generated by this study suggest that this phase was not spontaneous but was enabled precisely by underground knowledge that persisted concurrently throughout colonial learning. Thus, if it is correct that the original settlers – Allison's followers- had indeed become fully enculturated into Western culture, then unlearning was not possible for this group (because the underground and liftground were the same thing). For those who moved into Edendale later, however, whilst liftground institutions enforced epistemic displacement, elders maintained oral histories, spiritual practices, and healing knowledge in domestic spaces shielded from missionary surveillance. This simultaneity, captured in Rule and John's (2011) spatial framework, ensured that the epistemic substrate for rupture remained intact. Without underground persistence operating during (not after) colonial learning, unlearning would have lacked the reference point from which to contest imposed hierarchies.

Historical reclamation exemplifies rupture through the LUR lens. KH2's invocation of Queen Machibisa as "a woman… actually she was the King" (Interview 2, 29 May 2025) and KH4's insistence that "Edendale was never empty. It belonged to the Zondi chieftaincy" (River of Life workshop, 30 October 2025) function as acts of epistemic reclamation refusing the colonial binary that positioned African polity as chaos awaiting European order, or simply non-existent. These assertions imply that rupture operates not merely as negation but as affirmative recovery: knowledge holders draw upon underground transmissions preserved through intergenerational dialogue to construct counter-histories that render colonial periodisation illegitimate.

Fanon (1967) theorises decolonisation as a violent rupture with colonial consciousness, yet his formulation centres the colonised intellectual's solitary awakening. The Edendale narratives extend Fanon by demonstrating how rupture emerges collectively through elders' underground transmissions, providing the epistemic substrate against which missionary cartography (beginning Edendale's history in 1851) could be named as imposition rather than origin. This suggests that unlearning requires not an individual epiphany but relational continuity: the preservation of subaltern knowledge beneath liftground dominance created the very conditions that enabled refusal. Without this underground persistence operating during colonial learning, not after it, rupture would have lacked the reference point necessary to contest imposed hierarchies. Spiritual refusal further dismantles imposed binaries, demanding exclusive allegiance to Western Christianity. As KH8 earlier articulated (Section 8.3.4), believing “in God through the ancestors” positioned *amadlozi* as mediators rather than rivals, a cosmological logic that colonial binaries could not extinguish because it persisted underground during colonial education/learning itself. KH3 recounts her grandfather maintaining the *umsamo* whilst attending church, practising "doing both" not as a theological compromise but as a critical rupture: rejecting the colonial premise that African spirituality required eradication. This extends Ntombana's (2015) non-exclusionary spirituality by revealing refusal as a form of epistemic sovereignty. Pedagogical reclamation exposes colonial schooling as mental colonisation. KH7's reflection that "Western education helped academically, but it colonised our minds" (Interview 3, 18 September 2025) names epistemic violence beneath progress's veneer. This aligns with Dei's (2012) argument that African pedagogy? is inherently relational; the Edendale data extend Dei by revealing how unlearning emerges precisely through recognising colonial schooling's delegitimisation of Indigenous modes of becoming. Significantly, the Afrocentric approach to a dialogical research process

enabled participants to interrogate experiences that had previously been collectively taken for granted. The River of Life workshop, in particular, became a reflective space through which some knowledge holders critically reconsidered inherited assumptions. As one elder explained, the process involved "seeing clearly what we had accepted as normal." Viewed through the LUR framework, such moments can be understood as expressions of unlearning, while recognising that participants' experiences varied in depth, form, and trajectory. This aligns with Hlela's (2018) assertion that Afrocentric research functions as a methodology of recovery and practice of liberation. Unlearning thus constitutes relational rupture forged through collective witnessing, not solitary introspection. Unlearning marks the LUR triad's transformative threshold: the decisive rehumanising phase restoring knowledge holders as epistemic subjects rather than objects of history, moving beyond epistemic justice toward decoloniality, the sovereign right to define knowledge on African relational terms. This rupture creates the necessary conditions for relearning as relational reconstruction.

8.10 Relearning as Relational Reconstruction (LUR Lens)

Relearning within the LUR triad denotes relational reconstruction, the forward-looking regeneration of epistemic sovereignty grounded in *Ubuntu*. This phase operates not as a nostalgic restoration of pristine origins but as innovative continuity: creatively reassembling fragments preserved underground during colonial education/learning to address present conditions whilst retaining ontological coherence. Furthermore, the Afrocentric "centering" employed in this study is not a rigid ontological binary that rejects all engagement with the "other" or denies the reality of hybridity; rather, it functions as a strategic, corrective methodology to address the historical violence of epistemic marginalisation and restore African subjects as agents of knowledge. In Rule and John's (2011) terms, this process constitutes the emergence of a new foreground (i.e. present reality), one actively forged through the retrieval and reconfiguration of underground knowledge within contemporary sites of struggle, healing, and pedagogy. Far from a passive reception of dominant structures, this foreground is co-constituted by agency, memory, and ethical commitment to collective becoming.

Adaptive mentorship exemplifies reconstruction through the LUR lens in those instances where knowledge holders explicitly frame their interventions as epistemic reclamation rather than mere cultural preservation or pragmatic adaptation. KH3 advocates for youth clubs

extracting the ethical core of *iqhikiza* and *entabeni* to address contemporary crisesnot as museums of tradition but as living spaces for moral formation through boxing, storytelling, and communal discipline (Interview 3, 24 September 2025). Similarly, KH4 insists that "restoration must begin at home; if cultural teachings are absent in the household, schools and churches cannot compensate for the loss" (Interview 2, 24 May 2025). While this underscores the irreplaceable role of the homestead in Indigenous pedagogy, it also reveals a paradox: the very institutions named as insufficient (i.e. schools and churches) were historically instrumental in displacing household-based transmission through colonial education and Christian moral regulation. This suggests that unlearning remains incomplete where the epistemic violence of these institutions is not explicitly named, even as their current limitations are acknowledged. Alternatively, KH4's emphasis may reflect a dual concern: not only the loss of African customs but also the perceived decline of moral order once enforced by mission-derived structures a tension that underscores how colonial frameworks can persist even within calls for cultural restoration. Read through Ntseane's (2011) theorisation of African pedagogy as relational accountability, KH4's account demonstrates that ethical and pedagogical functions were not extinguished but reconfigured within spatially compressed and urbanised contexts. Epistemic resilience thus emerges not as immunity to rupture, but as the capacity to sustain relational integrity under conditions of constraint. Orality emerges as living pedagogy revitalising narrative rationality as sovereign epistemic infrastructure. Knowledge holders advocate for community workshops teaching Princess Magogo's songs not as heritage display but as vessels of historical memory and ethical discernment. KH3's recollection that "a lesson is instilled better through a story than by saying, 'Thou shalt not do ABC'" (Interview 3, 28 August 2025), affirms Scheub's (1985) argument that African oral narratives function as living archives. However, the Edendale data extend Scheub by revealing how orality operates relationally cultivating ethical discernment through emotional resonance and communal witnessing rather than merely storing information.

Land re-emerges as a sovereign epistemic ground amid spatial constraint. Grave maintenance, resistance to commodification, and insistence on home burials affirm land not as alienable property but as an intergenerational dialogue space. KH6's emphasis on teaching *izithakazelo* to "know your roots and can teach young ones" (Interview 2, 4 September 2025) grounds identity in lineage as counter to urban deracination. This extends Ramose's (2005) articulation of land as living ancestor by revealing how ontology operates under material constraint: when ancestral graves lie beneath tarmac, epistemic sovereignty shifts to

mnemonic reclamation - naming erased sites, teaching place-memory, performing ritual at substitute locations. Significantly, relearning emerged as dialogical regeneration. During River of Life workshops, knowledge holders taught *izithakazelo* to research team members, enacting transmission as a living practice. The transect walk became a pedagogical space where elders pointed to tarmac-covered graves and collectively declared, "This was ours", converting spatial erasure into sites of epistemic reclamation. These encounters embody Reviere's (2001) *kujitoa* ethical commitment realised through shared labour. Analytically, this reveals relearning as collective becoming: epistemic sovereignty restored not through individual mastery but through relational practice grounded in *Ubuntu*.

Relearning thus moves decisively beyond epistemic justice toward epistemic sovereignty, the right to define wellness, pedagogy, spirituality, and governance on African relational terms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). This constitutes learning as decolonial praxis: the recursive navigation through which African people restore themselves as subjects of knowledge within historically conditioned realities.

8.11 Critical Realism: Acknowledging Irreversible Loss Within the LUR Framework

To frame Edendale's narrative solely in terms of resilience risks erasing its wounds. Critical realism positioned ethically within the LUR framework prevents romanticisation by holding rupture and regeneration in productive tension. This stance affirms epistemic complexity: at least for those descended from the Indigenous population that originally inhabited the broader Edendale area, coloniality produced forms of loss exceeding temporary disruption, yet agency persists within conditions of fragmentation rather than despite them. The LUR triad accommodates this reality precisely because relearning does not presume intact archives; it operates from fragments preserved underground.

However, according to at least one knowledge holder, botanical knowledge has fractured to the point of being beyond full restoration. KH8 states bluntly: "Children today do not know the names of the herbs… the Western has won" (Interview 2, 22 May 2025). This position indicates that the loss reflects not generational apathy but epistemic dislocation, the severing of linguistic, ecological, and spiritual vocabularies that anchor Indigenous healing systems. Chilisa (2012) observes that when elders pass without transmitting orally held knowledge, libraries burn; the Edendale data extend Chilisa by revealing cumulative attrition: each

generation retaining fewer plant names, each migration severing another thread of ecological memory. Eyong (2007) argues that the disappearance of plant names constitutes ontological loss - once unnamed, a plant is expelled from the moral and cosmological universe. Loss here is not merely informational but relational, the rupture of kinship ties between people, plants, and place.

Sacred sites have been materially obliterated, as is suggested by KH4's remark during the transect walk, that "They built over the graves. Now there is tarmac. You cannot return to what is gone" (Transect Walk, 30 October 2025). This articulation reveals spatial violence beyond symbolic erasure. Coulthard (2014) asserts that land functions as an archive; Ramose (2005) emphasises that land is a living ancestor binding the departed, the living, and the unborn. When graves are paved over, memory is violently severed from place; no amount of oral narration restores what concrete has erased. This reality does not negate the claim advanced in Section 8.5.1—that land re-emerges as a sovereign epistemic ground amid spatial constraint - but rather defines the very conditions under which such re-emergence becomes necessary and meaningful. The Edendale narratives extend Ramose by revealing how epistemic sovereignty adapts under constraint: sovereignty shifts to mnemonic practice, naming erased sites, teaching histories, and performing ritual at substitute locations. However, this adaptation operates amid loss, not beyond it. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) cautions that uncritical resilience narratives obscure the depth of colonial rupture; the Edendale case affirms resilience precisely by acknowledging what cannot be recovered, demonstrating that agency persists not despite loss but within its very terrain.

Acknowledging loss does not paralyse transformation; it grounds relearning ethically. Decolonisation, as Mignolo (2011) reminds us, is not a return to pristine origins but building anew from fragments. The LUR triad accommodates this: relearning draws on what remains to forge innovative continuity, and thus reshape the foreground. The call to return to roots (Section 8.6.3) must therefore be understood not as literal restoration but as metaphorical reorientation: recentering African epistemic frameworks as the ground for addressing contemporary crises. This aligns with critical realism's demand that relearning acknowledge rupture while refusing despair.

Critical realism thus strengthens decolonial scholarship by rejecting the false binary of total epistemicide versus seamless continuity. It honours both the depth of colonial violence and the persistence of African epistemic agency, refusing to let either truth erase the other. Within the LUR architecture, this realism ensures relearning remains ethically grounded: not

nostalgic restoration but forward-looking regeneration that acknowledges rupture whilst refusing despair.

8.12 Conclusion: Epistemic Transformation Through the LUR Triad

This chapter has applied the learning–unlearning–relearning (LUR) triad as its central theoretical lens to analyse epistemic transformation in Edendale through two interrelated analytical pathways: an inductive engagement with the data and a deductive theorisation of transformation. Together, these analyses demonstrate that epistemic change in Edendale unfolded neither as total erasure nor as seamless continuity, but as epistemic displacement that left sufficient fragments for regeneration.

The inductive analysis (Sections 8.2–8.6) placed knowledge holders' narratives in sustained dialogue with the literature reviewed in Chapters Two and Three, thereby demonstrating how the Edendale data extend, refine, and in some cases problematise existing scholarship. While Dei (2012) and Ramose (1999) theorise Indigenous knowledge as relational and morally grounded, the Edendale data reveal its concrete, gendered architecture through the *iqhikiza* and *entabeni* mentorship systems. While Santos (2014) conceptualises epistemicide as systemic erasure, the data instead demonstrate displacement rather than disappearance, with Indigenous epistemologies persisting underground (at least for some inhabitants of Edendale) through syncretism, compartmentalisation, and embodied practice. Crucially, the chapter shows that AIKS in Edendale did not operate as discrete domains but as an ontologically integrated epistemic infrastructure in which ontology (being), epistemology (knowing), and axiology (valuing) remained inseparable. This advances beyond literature that treats Indigenous knowledge as fragmented cultural elements by demonstrating its operational coherence in everyday social life.

The deductive analysis (Sections 8.7–8.11) theorised epistemic transformation through the LUR triad, explicitly structured by Rule and John's (2011) four-dimensional context framework. Colonial education - "learning" - functioned as epistemic violence, enacted through institutional reordering that reconfigured the background (precolonial structures of governance, mentorship, and land ethics), suppressed Indigenous modes of knowledge validation, and installed a Eurocentric liftground (missionary doctrine, cadastral law, formal schooling) as the sole arbiter of legitimacy. Crucially, the underground—comprising

submerged yet persistent Indigenous ontologies, oral traditions, and relational pedagogies, at least of the later Edendale inhabitants, did not emerge after colonial disruption; rather, it endured concurrently beneath the liftground, precisely because, as argued in Chapter Two, African epistemic systems were not eradicated but enmeshed within the coloniality of power. This underground persistence constituted the epistemic condition that made unlearning possible: subaltern knowledge surviving beneath dominant institutions provided the substrate from which colonial hierarchies could be critically refused. Unlearning thus emerged not as gradual reform but as rupture, a moment of refusal enabled by the continued presence of Indigenous epistemic memory. Finally, relearning operates as the forging of a new foreground: a present-day reality actively reshaped through the retrieval and creative reassembly of underground knowledge to address contemporary conditions, thereby regenerating epistemic sovereignty without nostalgic restoration.

This involved the adaptive reassembly of fragments preserved underground, producing innovative continuity grounded in *Ubuntu* rather than replication of historical forms. Drawing on a critical realist orientation, the analysis acknowledges irreversible loss without surrendering agency and rejects the false binary between total epistemicide and seamless continuity. Collectively, the chapter advances three interrelated contributions to decolonial scholarship. First, it demonstrates that epistemic displacement**,** rather than epistemicide, more accurately captures the form of colonial violence enacted in Edendale, at least on those who arrived after Allison and his followers originally settled the land: knowledge was marginalised, delegitimised, and reorganised rather than extinguished. Second, it establishes underground persistence after colonial learning as the critical condition enabling epistemic rupture and refusal for this group of people. Third, it theorises relearning as innovative continuity grounded in *Ubuntu***,** showing how epistemic sovereignty can be reclaimed through relational regeneration rather than nostalgic restoration, thus creating the possibility of a new foreground.

Through these contributions, the chapter reframes epistemic transformation as a recursive decolonial praxis. The four-stage movement of Indigenous learning (precolonial sovereignty), colonial education/learning (displacement), unlearning (rupture), and relearning (reconstruction) exposes how coloniality weaponised "learning" as a technology of domination (i.e. education), while affirming Indigenous pedagogy as sovereign epistemic infrastructure. Decolonial praxis resides not in an idealised return to origins nor in accommodation to colonial knowledge, but in the transformative arc from rupture to

reconstruction, where African people reconstitute themselves as subjects of knowledge through critical refusal and relational renewal.

This study, therefore, contributes to decolonial theory by demonstrating that, in certain circumstances, epistemic sovereignty can persist not through unbroken continuity but through the adaptive reassembly of fragments preserved underground and reactivated through unlearning. Resilience is reframed not as immunity to rupture but as the capacity to rebuild from fragments without surrendering ontological coherence. In doing so, the Edendale case advances beyond both triumphalist narratives of continuity and pessimistic accounts of total epistemicide, offering a grounded theorisation of epistemic transformation as simultaneously historical, disruptive, and generative. Chapter Nine brings the thesis to a close by synthesising the key findings, reflecting on their broader implications, and advancing recommendations.

Summary, Recommendation and Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter synthesises the key insights of the study, which set out to understand how AIKS were historically practised within the Edendale community, how the imposition of Western knowledge frameworks disrupted these systems, and how these impacts continue to shape contemporary cultural memory and knowledge acquisition. Anchored by the study's three research questions, the inquiry examined the historical practices that constituted Indigenous knowledge in Edendale; analysed the depth and character of Western epistemic intrusion; and explored how these influences have transformed Indigenous practices and learning processes across generations. To address these questions, the study employed archival engagement and Afrocentric, community-rooted methodologies: oral history interviews, a Transect Walk, and the River of Life technique. Collectively, these methods offered textured and layered perspectives on the lived realities of knowledge formation, cultural continuity, and disruption. Importantly, they enabled knowledge holders to articulate their experiences in ways that centred African agency, honoured cultural memory, and upheld Afrocentric principles of learning, unlearning, and re-learning as pathways for reclaiming Indigenous epistemic dignity. As established in Chapters Three and Six, Edendale's 1851 settlers were already epistemically transformed Christian converts who arrived on land cleared by Pretorius; the knowledge holders whose narratives form the foundation of this chapter are descendants of indigenous populations from the broader region who later reoccupied the subdivided portions of *Welverdiend*.

The findings were organised into five interrelated themes that captured the historical, social, and cultural evolution of Edendale: the community's pre-colonial origins; the pedagogical and moral foundations of AIKS; the penetration of colonial and Western institutions; the socio-cultural fragmentation that followed; and the emergent syncretic resilience that characterises present-day attempts at restoration. This chapter synthesises these findings, integrates the study's theoretical and empirical contributions, outlines its limitations, and offers recommendations for future research and practice. It concludes with a reflective

commentary on the significance of restoring Indigenous knowledge within communities marked by both historical loss and enduring resilience.

9.2 Edendale in the National Frame: Hybridity, Mission-Educated Elites, and Urban Indigeneity

While rooted in one township, Edendale's story reflects broader postcolonial tensions in South Africa. Its identity as a mission-founded yet ancestrally grounded community mirrors the experience of countless urban Black South Africans who navigate dual inheritances: Western education and Christian morality on one hand, and Indigenous cosmologies on the other. The internal conflicts voiced by knowledge holders such as KH5's recollection of being told that "the ancestors are demons" echo nationwide struggles within Black churches, where Pentecostalism often frames ancestral veneration as spiritually dangerous. Similarly, the erosion of intergenerational knowledge speaks to a national crisis in cultural transmission, exacerbated by apartheid-era forced removals, rural underdevelopment, and the privileging of English-medium schooling. However, Edendale also models resilience: its syncretic practices – attending church while maintaining the *umsamo* (KH3) or blending *lobola* with Christian weddings (KH7) – demonstrate how African epistemologies adapt without surrender. In this sense, Edendale is not an anomaly but a microcosm of what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2022) terms "entangled modernities" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022), where African agency persists within, against, and beyond colonial structures. Understanding Edendale thus offers insights into how urban townships across South Africa negotiate tradition, modernity, and epistemic sovereignty in the post-apartheid era.

The findings of this study cohere around five interrelated themes that together illuminate the historical depth, epistemic tensions, and resilient adaptations characterising knowledge life in Edendale. These themes are summarised below.

9.2.1 Theme 1: Origins of Edendale – Empty land or pre-colonial African sovereignty

The findings reveal that Edendale's origins were embedded in existing African territoriality and leadership systems, confirming the counter-narrative to the long-standing colonial narrative that the land was "empty" prior to settlement by James Allison and his followers, as is evident in more recent published literature. Knowledge holders consistently rejected the notion of emptiness, emphasising the continuity of African presence, sovereignty, and cultural

practices instead, even as missionary-led immigration introduced layers of socio-cultural negotiation. This theme confirmed that the "empty land" myth served colonial interests by attempting to erase African ownership and legitimise Western claims to space, authority, and epistemic superiority. Knowledge holders' claims reaffirmed the need for historical correction and for re-rooting Edendale within its African pre-colonial context. Within this perspective, sovereignty is understood to extend across the broader Pietermaritzburg region, where Indigenous populations maintained epistemic continuity despite displacement and later reoccupied subdivided portions of *Welverdiend* during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Knowledge holders therefore carry the Indigenous knowledge documented in this study descended from these surrounding communities, reflecting knowledge systems that endured through territorial rupture and adaptive continuity.

9.2.2 Theme 2: African Indigenous Knowledge Systems: pedagogy, moral foundations, and community structure

Theme two highlights the depth, structure, and intentionality of Indigenous learning systems before their disruption. Crucially, these pedagogical structures were sustained by knowledge holders descended from Indigenous populations of the broader Pietermaritzburg region, who, through subsequent land subdivisions, became Edendale residents and carried knowledge systems preserved despite displacement rather than inherited from the original settlers. The data suggest that knowledge was transmitted through age-graded mentorship, gendered pathways, communal labour, moral instruction, and embodied practice. Knowledge holders described how learning occurred through observing elders, participating in communal activities, and engaging in social rituals that shaped identity, moral character, and social cohesion. These findings echo Afrocentric literature, which positions Indigenous learning as experiential, moral, communal, and spiritually grounded and confirms that Edendale once operated within pedagogical structures aligned with African cultural philosophy. The moral universe of the community was shaped not by formal schooling but by relational accountability, respect for elders, and lived practice.

9.2.3 Theme 3: Colonial/Western institutional penetration and the reordering of African life and knowledge

Knowledge holders consistently identified missionary activity, Western schooling, and colonial law as the key forces that disrupted Indigenous knowledge systems. These institutions introduced new worldviews, forms of authority, and value systems that aimed to

reconfigure African social life in line with colonial and Christian ideals. Many described Western schooling as both a pathway to social mobility and a mechanism for cultural erasure – a duality that directly reflects what this study theorises as learning: the initial internalisation of colonial epistemic frameworks that positioned African ways of knowing as inferior, irrational, or obsolete. In this context, Christian doctrine was promoted over traditional ritual instruction, literacy prioritised above oral transmission, and Western morality elevated above communal African ethics – not as neutral additions, but as instruments designed to delegitimise, displace, and restructure Indigenous systems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986).

However, crucially, knowledge holders also affirmed that complete erasure never occurred. This insight is central to the framework's understanding of learning not as passive assimilation, but as an imposed epistemic condition, one that shaped consciousness and institutional life, yet never fully extinguished African epistemic agency. As Asante (1995) argues, colonised subjects were "decentred" from their cultural foundations, but not wholly reconstituted in the image of the coloniser. The persistence of Indigenous knowledge in adapted, fragmented, and hybrid forms reflects precisely this incompleteness. Epprecht (2017) notes that Edendale has demonstrated enduring intellectual and cultural agency, continually negotiating its identity amid colonial and postcolonial pressures. Such resilience signals that while learning embedded colonial hierarchies, it also created the conditions for critical awareness – the threshold from which unlearning and relearning become possible. Importantly, the persistence of Indigenous knowledge in Edendale was sustained by knowledge holders descended from displaced Indigenous populations of the broader Pietermaritzburg region, who navigated colonial and missionary impositions while retaining and adapting African epistemic frameworks, ensuring continuity of moral, social, and pedagogical systems despite disruption.

Thus, the historical account offered by knowledge holders does not merely document loss; it reveals the epistemic terrain of learning as the necessary starting point for decolonial transformation. The very recognition that substitutions were partial affirms that African epistemologies endured beneath the surface of imposed knowledge, setting the stage for the active processes of epistemic reclamation that define this study's broader analytical arc.

9.2.4 Theme 4: Socio-cultural fragmentation and the crisis of individualism

According to the data generated in this study, the cumulative effect of Western institutional penetration produced deep socio-cultural fragmentation. Knowledge holders spoke openly about the erosion of communal bonds, the weakening of intergenerational ties, and the rise of individualism, particularly among younger generations. Rituals that once anchored collective identity were either abandoned, stigmatised as "backwards," or absorbed into Christian frameworks that stripped them of their Indigenous meaning. Simultaneously, Western value systems promoted self-orientation, competition, and material accumulation over the African ethical imperatives of *Ubuntu*, *ujamaa*, and communal responsibility. Crucially, this process did not conclude with the formal end of colonial rule. Rather, it persists through what Quijano (2000) terms coloniality, as discussed in Chapter Two, the invisible but active continuation of colonial logics in postcolonial institutions, social norms, and everyday consciousness. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) argues, coloniality operates as a "colonial matrix of power" that reproduces hierarchies of knowledge, being, and value long after independence. In Edendale, this manifests in the ongoing privileging of Western education, the marginalisation of oral epistemologies, and the internalised suspicion of Indigenous healing, governance, and moral instruction even within families and churches founded by *amakholwa*.

This enduring condition is best understood as the epistemic terrain of learning: the foundational phase in the Afrocentric learning-unlearning-relearning model. As articulated in Chapter Four, the historical and psychological internalisation of colonial frameworks positioned African ways of knowing as inferior, irrational, or obsolete. The fragmentation described by knowledge holders is thus not merely a historical residue but a living legacy of imposed learning: a condition in which Euro-modern individualism, written literacy, and Christian morality continue to be valorised as markers of progress, while relational ontologies, oral transmission, and ancestral ethics are unconsciously devalued even by those who embody them.

Consequently, the persistence of coloniality in Edendale reveals that learning is not a past event but an ongoing structure of feeling, thought, and practice. Crucially, this fragmentation and internalised coloniality have been navigated and resisted by knowledge holders descended from Indigenous populations of the broader Pietermaritzburg region, who continue to preserve, adapt, and transmit African epistemologies, ensuring continuity and moral cohesion despite socio-cultural disruption. Epistemic reclamation, therefore, cannot be

framed as a nostalgic return to a pre-colonial past but must be understood as a contemporary decolonial praxis: one that begins by confronting what has been learned, dismantling its unconscious hold, and creating space for relearning African epistemologies on their own terms.

9.2.5 Theme 5: Syncretic resilience and the imperative of restoration

Despite the erosion and restructuring of Indigenous knowledge systems, knowledge holders emphasised significant cultural resilience. African values, practices, and moral frameworks persisted in modified, hybridised, and contextually adaptive forms. Knowledge holders also expressed strong desires for cultural restoration, highlighting the importance of reclaiming, relearning, and revitalising African knowledge for future generations. This process aligns directly with the Afrocentric principle of learning, unlearning, and relearning as outlined in the theoretical framework. Within this framework, learning refers to the initial internalisation of colonial epistemic norms through missionary education, legal regulation, and religious instruction, which often displaced Indigenous pedagogies and moral systems, and to the beginning of critical awareness of this process. Unlearning involves critically deconstructing these internalised hierarchies and challenging the assumption that African ways of knowing are inferior, irrational, or obsolete (Adeate & Sewchurran, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). Relearning, in contrast, is the creative reconstruction of African epistemologies for contemporary life, drawing on ancestral wisdom while responding to present social and cultural realities (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2000; Sarfo-Mensah, 2024). In Edendale, this is evident in community initiatives such as the teaching of *izibongo* (praise poetry) for moral instruction, intergenerational dialogues on land stewardship, and the continued use of Indigenous healing and ritual practices. By situating these acts within the learning-unlearning-relearning triad, it becomes clear that cultural restoration is not mere nostalgia but an active, decolonial process of epistemic regeneration that sustains African agency, identity, and ethical frameworks (Asante, 1995).

9.3 Synthesis and General Conclusions

A synthesis of findings from archival records, oral history interviews, the Transect Walk, and the River of Life narratives reveals a nuanced trajectory of knowledge transformation in Edendale. While the site of Edendale was established under colonial administration with the settlement of Allison and his Christian community, the data support arguments that African

people had occupied the area prior to this colonial intervention. Over time, Indigenous knowledge systems, already present in the broader region, were shaped, suppressed, and hybridised through the imposition of Western frameworks embedded in missionary education, formal schooling, colonial law, and apartheid policies. As a result, knowledge in Edendale now exists in partial, hybrid, and sometimes fragmented forms, reflecting both overt and subtle processes of epistemic disruption. These findings underscore the ongoing need to unlearn, critically deconstructing internalised colonial hierarchies, and to relearn, reclaiming and revitalising African ways of knowing. Indeed, by foregrounding knowledge holders' narratives and prompting reflection on historical and contemporary epistemic patterns, this study contributes to the community's processes of unlearning and relearning.

Despite this colonial entrenchment, Indigenous knowledge has persisted. It survives in oral traditions, intergenerational memory, cultural values, and the embodied practices of elders, demonstrating that Edendale's heritage is not a closed chapter but a continuing narrative of resilience, adaptation, and cultural persistence. The Afrocentric principle of learning, unlearning, and relearning provides a powerful lens for tracing both historical and contemporary knowledge practices in the community. Early forms of learning were intentional, communal, and deeply embodied, rooted in African philosophies of personhood, reciprocity, and collective responsibility. Knowledge was transmitted through mentorship, gendered pathways of becoming, storytelling, ritual practices, and collective labour, inseparable from moral and spiritual formation.

With the arrival of Christian settlers and colonial structures, many Indigenous practices were devalued, silenced, or abandoned. Learning occurred through both coercion and the allure of Western education and Christian identity, shaping rituals, languages, kinship pedagogies, and cultural rites into practices considered incompatible with Western modernity. Unlearning, by contrast, emerges only when individuals and communities critically interrogate these internalised hierarchies and begin to reclaim epistemic sovereignty. Relearning manifests in efforts to revive language, ritual, land-based practices, oral histories, and Indigenous pedagogies – acts that are simultaneously cultural and political, challenging entrenched hierarchies and reasserting African epistemic authority. The findings reveal a growing commitment to reclaim and reconstruct suppressed knowledge. This analysis makes clear that Indigenous knowledge of the original inhabitants of the broader later Edendale area never vanished; it persisted as a living archive embedded in memory, ethical frameworks, and surviving practices. The Edendale History project's ongoing work to retain, adapt, and

reawaken its heritage exemplifies the resilience of African epistemologies, even under sustained colonial influence and continuing coloniality. Restoring Indigenous Knowledge Systems is therefore more than cultural remembrance; it represents a pathway for reclaiming identity, asserting autonomy, and enabling transformative educational futures for coming generations.

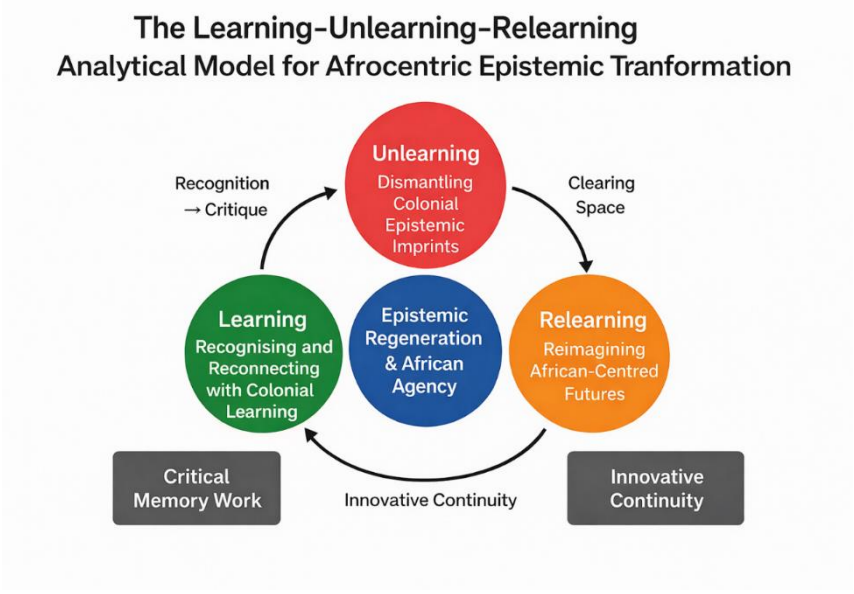
9.4 Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to ongoing discussions in theory, empirical research, and methodology, while recognising the limitations of its scope and context. It offers insights into the dynamics of Indigenous knowledge systems in Edendale, illustrating how communities negotiate continuity, disruption, and adaptation under historical and contemporary pressures. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of combining archival research, oral history, Transect Walks, and the River of Life method to capture nuanced, community-centred perspectives. These contributions are indicative rather than definitive, highlighting patterns and processes that may inform further research rather than presenting conclusive generalisations.

Collectively, these contributions hopefully advance Afrocentric scholarship, deepen understandings of Indigenous Knowledge Systems within mission-founded African communities, and reposition Edendale within broader historical and epistemic lineages.

9.4.1 Theoretical contributions

Theoretically, the study enriches contemporary Afrocentric and decolonial scholarship by developing the Recursive Triad of Epistemic Rehumanisation, an original, empirically grounded model



the Afrocentric principle of learning, unlearning, and relearning, into a dynamic, non-linear framework that integrates epistemic process, contextual architecture, and relational praxis.

The triad operates on two interconnected levels. First, it functions as an analytical framework for interpreting how knowledge holders in Edendale have navigated colonial epistemic impositions across generations. Second, it operates as a performative methodology, guiding the research team's engagement with time, authority, and knowledge co-creation. In this dual capacity, the model is both a lens for understanding epistemic transformation and a praxis of rehumanisation and epistemic justice.

The triad interacts with Rule and John's (2015) four-dimensional context framework—precolonial sovereignty (background), colonial institutions (liftground), silenced knowledge (underground), and present-day reclamation (foreground), providing a spatiotemporal architecture for understanding epistemic persistence and transformation. Rigour within this model is relational rather than linear, grounded in the Afrocentric canons of Ubuntu, Ujamaa, Kujitoa, and Ukweli. By situating the model within a specific African community, the study extends Afrocentric theory beyond abstraction into the domain of adult, community, and lifelong learning, conceptualising learning, unlearning, and relearning as forms of epistemic resistance and cultural self-definition.

Empirically, the study extends existing accounts challenging Eurocentric portrayals of Edendale as a "civilised" missionary enclave. By analysing how knowledge holders navigate the enduring legacies of such narratives through processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning, the study shifts the analytical focus from historical correction to epistemic praxis. It offers a theoretical lens for understanding not only what happened in Edendale but also how communities make meaning, reclaim agency, and reconstruct knowledge in the aftermath of epistemic imposition.

9.4.2 Empirical contributions

Empirically, the study contributes an original and richly detailed body of knowledge documenting Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Edendale, much of which has not been formally recorded in written sources. By engaging elders aged between 60 and 86, the research captures memories and insights that demonstrate both the continuity of Indigenous knowledge practices and the pressures they face amid generational change, urbanisation, and the dominance of Western educational frameworks.

These narratives reveal lived experiences of mentorship structures, gendered pathways of becoming, Indigenous moral reasoning, communal practices, ritual life, kinship obligations, spiritual sensibilities, and linguistic expressions that are rarely documented in mainstream literature.

The study's empirical contribution lies not only in preserving these narratives but also in illuminating the complexity of cultural change in Edendale. The findings show that Indigenous practices were not simply displaced by missionary or colonial systems; instead, they were negotiated, adapted, concealed, or blended. Elders' accounts illustrate how Christianity and colonial schooling interacted with Indigenous beliefs, sometimes producing cultural hybridity and at other times generating resistance or quiet preservation. This complexity clarifies how African communities such as Edendale navigated Western knowledge systems: often adopting what was advantageous, questioning what conflicted with Indigenous ethics, and discreetly maintaining cultural practices beneath the surface of Christian respectability. The empirical richness of the study, therefore, contributes to scholarship on community history, cultural resilience, syncretism, and the lived realities of Afro-Christian identities. It also contributes directly to Edendale's own cultural preservation by creating a corpus of documented knowledge that can inform educational initiatives, museum displays, community programmes, and intergenerational dialogues.

9.4.3 Methodological contributions

Methodologically, the study offers significant insights into participatory, cross-cultural, and decolonial research practices grounded in Afrocentric principles. Conducting research in Edendale as a Nigerian scholar required a heightened commitment to respect, humility, and cultural sensitivity, reinforcing the understanding that ethical and meaningful research in African communities depends on engagement through cultural protocols, recognition of elders as knowledge custodians, and attentiveness to the spiritual and relational dimensions of knowledge generation. Within this framework, the study demonstrates that trustworthiness and ethics are inseparable in Afrocentric research, as articulated in Reviere's (2001) five canons: *Kujitoa* (value-based commitment), *Utulivu* (justice and harmonious relationships), *Ujamaa* (communal belonging and co-creation), *Ukweli* (truth grounded in community experience), and *Uhaki* (fairness and epistemic justice). These canons were not treated as abstract ideals but were operationalised throughout the research process. Ethical decisions prioritised communal well-being over extractive timelines (*Kujitoa*), honoured elders as

custodians of knowledge (Utulivu), and approached knowledge generation as a communal, co-created process (*Ujamaa*), with truth grounded in shared interpretation and lived experience (*Ukweli*). Archival silences and oral testimonies were read together to affirm *Uhaki*, understood not only as accuracy but as justice in representation.

A key methodological strength of the study was the research team's involvement, which played an essential role in shaping its depth and cultural integrity. Drawn from the Edendale History Project, the team supported contextual interpretation, facilitated engagement with knowledge holders, navigated linguistic nuances, and co-designed data-generation activities such as the Transect Walk and the River of Life approach. Their involvement ensured cultural resonance throughout the study and demonstrated that participatory research is strongest when anchored in shared interpretation, member-checking, and respect for community epistemic authority. The study also demonstrates the effectiveness of methods aligned with Afrocentric research, such as storytelling, reflective life histories, Transect Walks, and the River of Life approach, in eliciting nuanced, emotionally grounded, and culturally embedded data. These methods proved adaptable and effective within a cross-cultural research context, illustrating that Afrocentric principles can be applied flexibly when grounded in culturally sensitive and relational practice.

At the same time, the study encountered constraints inherent to this methodological model. Elder availability was sometimes unpredictable due to bereavement or caregiving responsibilities; team dynamics shifted and required renegotiation of roles; and institutional timelines often clashed with Afrocentric rhythms of relationship-building. These tensions do not undermine the methodological approach but instead clarify its conditions, underscoring that Reviere's canons demand relational accountability, researcher humility, and institutional flexibility, which are not always accommodated within conventional academic structures. Overall, the study contributes a grounded and reflexive methodological model for community-based, decolonial, and Afrocentric research. By demonstrating both the practical enactment and the real-world limits of Afrocentric ethical principles, it offers guidance for scholars seeking to conduct research in African communities that is respectful, collaborative, epistemologically aligned, and attentive to the complexities of prioritising African intellectual self-determination.

9.4.4 Pragmatic contributions

This study offers several pragmatic contributions that extend beyond academic knowledge, directly benefiting the Edendale community, the knowledge holders, and the research team engaged in the inquiry. By grounding the entire research process in Afrocentric values, relationality, respect, reciprocity, and community accountability, the study became not only an act of data generation but also a practical intervention in reclaiming and affirming Indigenous Knowledge within a historically marginalised community. For the knowledge holders, participation created a rare and meaningful space for reflection, narration, and recognition. Many had never been formally invited to articulate their experiences of Indigenous Knowledge and moral formation.

The research team, comprised largely of younger community members trained in participatory methods, played a pivotal role in facilitating intergenerational dialogue. Their presence signalled respect for elders' knowledge, countering decades of colonial and missionary messaging that had stigmatised Indigenous practices as "backward" or "un-Christian". This act of witnessing, listening attentively, and asking questions rooted in cultural curiosity rather than judgment created space for elders to share stories long held in silence. In doing so, it initiated a process of unlearning: both elders and younger participants began to question internalised hierarchies that positioned Western education and Christian morality as inherently superior. For elders, being asked to teach not as relics of a vanishing past but as living custodians of ethical and ecological wisdom restored dignity and reactivated their role as moral guides. For younger team members, engaging with ancestral knowledge through the Transect Walk and River of Life narratives became a form of relearning: not passive reception, but active reconstruction of identity grounded in *Ubuntu*, *Ukweli*, and communal responsibility.

Again, for the research team, the study served as a practical exercise in enacting Afrocentric research ethics. Engaging directly with community elders required humility, cultural sensitivity, and the discipline to listen deeply. The process strengthened the team's capacity to conduct research that preserves dignity, redistributes power, and honours Indigenous knowledge systems as living intellectual traditions. The team gained practical experience in collaborative interviewing, ethical engagement, and culturally aligned interpretation.

As the researcher, I found that the study provided a transformative experiential learning environment. Navigating both the insider-outsider positioning and the responsibility of

representing community knowledge demanded reflexivity, integrity, and a sustained commitment to Afrocentric principles. The process deepened methodological competence, sharpened analytical judgement, and strengthened the researcher's ability to facilitate respectful knowledge co-production rather than extractive scholarship. Collectively, these practical contributions demonstrate that the study was not merely an academic exercise but a socially grounded, relational, and empowering process. It actively strengthened cultural consciousness, encouraged community dialogue, and expanded the practical capacity of both knowledge holders and the research team to preserve and advance Indigenous Knowledge in contemporary Edendale.

This transformation was mirrored in my own journey as the researcher: I entered the field having learned Western research norms that prioritised control, linearity, and detachment; through sustained engagement, I unlearned the assumption that rigour requires distance, recognising instead how colonial logics had shaped my expectations of time, authority, and validity; and I relearned research as a relational, spiritual, and co-creative practice guided by Reviere's canons, rooted in *Ubuntu*, and accountable to the community's epistemic sovereignty. In this way, the study became a site of mutual becoming, where methodological choices and personal transformation were inseparable.

9.5 Implications for Scholarship, Community, and Practice

The findings of this study carry meaningful implications across multiple domains, encompassing scholarship, the Edendale community, and broader policy and practice contexts. From a scholarly perspective, the study underscores the importance of adopting Afrocentric frameworks when researching Indigenous Knowledge Systems. By foregrounding African epistemologies and centring the experiences and voices of knowledge holders, the research challenges the dominance of Eurocentric research paradigms. It demonstrates that African knowledge cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the historical disruptions wrought by colonialism, missionary interventions, and Western epistemic frameworks. The study also offers a methodological contribution by providing a model for cross-cultural, participatory, and community-rooted research, showing how collaboration with local knowledge holders and immersive, culturally sensitive methods can generate robust, authentic, and ethically grounded data. Scholars engaging with Indigenous

knowledge in African contexts can draw from this approach to design studies that respect community agency, cultural protocols, and epistemic integrity.

For the Edendale community, the study provides tangible benefits that extend beyond academic documentation. By capturing the narratives of elders, the research offers historical clarity about Indigenous practices, mentorship structures, moral formation, and communal life, which can inform educational programming, museum exhibitions, and school curricula. The preservation and documentation of these narratives contribute to cultural regeneration and strengthen intergenerational transmission of knowledge, supporting the revival of mentorship practices, ethical teachings, and community cohesion. Importantly, the study affirms the authority and agency of community knowledge holders, reinforcing a sense of pride, continuity, and cultural identity, and ensuring that Indigenous knowledge remains an accessible and enduring resource for current and future generations.

In the sphere of policy and practice, the study highlights the practical relevance of Indigenous Knowledge for local governance, education, and heritage initiatives. By emphasising the value of communal learning structures, traditional mentorship pathways, and Indigenous pedagogical approaches, the findings encourage policymakers, educators, and community practitioners to implement culturally responsive strategies that are informed by local epistemologies. The research demonstrates that integrating Indigenous knowledge into planning and development processes can enhance social cohesion, strengthen cultural identity, and support sustainable community initiatives. Moreover, the study provides guidance on designing interventions that are respectful, contextually grounded, and reflective of local cultural priorities, illustrating how research can bridge scholarship and practice to deliver tangible benefits for communities.

Collectively, these implications reveal that the study extends beyond academic contribution, actively supporting cultural preservation, community empowerment, and the development of culturally informed policies and practices. It illustrates the value of Afrocentric, participatory, and ethically engaged research not only as a method of knowledge production but also as a practical tool for community development, identity reinforcement, and social transformation in Edendale and similar African contexts.

9.6 Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Edendale, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research focused primarily on older adults aged 60-86, who are the main custodians of orally transmitted pre-missionary knowledge and practices. This allowed for in-depth exploration of historical memory and lived experiences, but the perspectives of younger community members, whose experiences are shaped by contemporary education, urbanisation, and hybrid identities, remain underexplored. Including younger voices could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Indigenous knowledge is transmitted, adapted, or contested across generations.

It is important to acknowledge two interrelated limitations. First, none of the knowledge holders was alive during the pre-colonial period; their understandings of earlier Indigenous practices are necessarily mediated through oral transmission, family narratives, and communal memory, what they were told, not what they directly experienced. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.4.3), African epistemologies do not treat such transmitted knowledge as inherently unreliable; rather, truth is validated through communal consensus, spiritual accountability, and practical efficacy, not just individual recollection. Verification often occurs through collective processes, such as calling a third witness or invoking ancestral oaths, rather than through positivist notions of factual accuracy (Ejikemeuwa, 2014; John, 2009). This epistemic logic informed the study's use of member checking and team-based interpretation, aligning the methodology with the very knowledge systems under investigation.

Second, the study relied heavily on memory-based data, including oral histories, River of Life narratives, and recollections of past practices. While these narratives are rich and invaluable, they are naturally subject to selective recall, personal interpretation, and the passage of time, which may have influenced the completeness or accuracy of some accounts. Triangulation with archival records and community verification helped mitigate this limitation, but cannot eliminate the challenges inherent in memory-based research.

In addition, conducting Afrocentric, participatory research within the university's codified structures and timelines posed challenges. The recursive, relational, and time-intensive nature of Afrocentric methods – including storytelling, reflective life histories, and co-generated knowledge – requires extended engagement with knowledge holders/participants. Balancing

these methodological demands with institutional timelines sometimes constrained the depth of iterative interactions, reflection, and co-analysis that the research ideally calls for.

Finally, the researcher's cross-cultural positionality introduced both opportunities and challenges. Being a ‘foreign’ researcher required careful reflexivity to ensure that cultural interpretations, linguistic nuances, and community practices were accurately understood and represented. Building trust, negotiating access, and interpreting complex cultural practices demanded sensitivity, humility, and ongoing consultation with local knowledge holders and the research team. While these measures strengthened the validity of the findings, cross-cultural positionality inevitably shaped the research process and interpretation. Acknowledging these limitations provides transparency and situates the findings within their appropriate context, highlighting areas for further investigation and refinement in future research.

9.7 Recommendations for Future Research

Drawing from the experiences of conducting this study and the insights gained from close engagement with knowledge holders in Edendale, several recommendations emerge to guide future research in Afrocentric, Indigenous, and community-centred contexts.

First, comparative studies across *Amakholwa* or other mission-founded communities are encouraged. Research that examines multiple communities of this nature can illuminate both the similarities and differences in Indigenous knowledge retention, cultural continuity, and community agency. Such comparative work would deepen understanding of how African Christian identities intersect with Indigenous practices in diverse contexts, and how communities negotiate, adapt, or resist external influences over time.

Second, investigations into youth perspectives on Indigenous identity and cultural continuity are necessary, particularly given the concerns raised by the knowledge holders in this study about young people. As urbanisation, modern education, and global influences reshape African communities, research that centres on youth can reveal how Indigenous knowledge, rites, and values are transmitted, adapted, or contested across generations. Such studies can provide valuable insight into how traditional pedagogical and mentorship structures are maintained, transformed, or challenged in contemporary contexts.

Third, participatory action research focused on reviving Indigenous mentorship, rites of passage, and ethical instruction is strongly recommended. Engaging communities actively in

the restoration of traditional mentorship structures and moral formation practices not only supports cultural preservation but also strengthens intergenerational knowledge transfer. These approaches should prioritise collaboration, reciprocity, and empowerment, ensuring that community members are co-creators of the research process rather than passive subjects, thereby fostering ownership and agency over cultural knowledge.

Fourth, archival research that complements oral histories is essential but only when approached with critical caution. Colonial-era archives, while containing valuable contextual detail, are not neutral repositories of truth. As demonstrated in Chapter Five, these records were produced within structures of power that systematically marginalised African voices, framed Indigenous practices as "backwards", and privileged missionary and state perspectives (Daly, 2017; Hodder, 2017). Archival silences, what was not recorded, whose stories were excluded, and which languages were not used, are often as telling as what was documented. Nevertheless, when read against the grain (Stoler, 2002) and placed in dialogue with community memory, archival materials helped trace institutional pressures, patterns of land dispossession, and shifts in governance that shaped Edendale's epistemic landscape. The goal is not to "verify" oral history through the archive – a move that reinstates colonial hierarchies of evidence – but to create a counter-archival conversation in which written records and lived memory interrogate, challenge, and illuminate one another. In this way, future studies can develop a richer, more layered understanding of how Indigenous Knowledge Systems have been disrupted, adapted, and sustained over time without surrendering epistemic authority to the very institutions that sought to erase them.

Fifth, future research should explore the role of institutions in supporting or hindering the preservation of Indigenous knowledge. The data make it clear that educational, religious, and local governance institutions often play critical roles in shaping the transmission and sustainability of cultural knowledge. Investigating how these institutions interact with Indigenous practices, and how Afrocentric approaches can inform culturally responsive institutional policies, will enhance both scholarly understanding and practical strategies for knowledge preservation.

Finally, methodological and documentation considerations are vital for the quality and ethical integrity of future research. Researchers should recognise the time-intensive nature of Afrocentric community-centred, participatory approaches and plan accordingly. They must navigate conventional academic constraints while maintaining flexibility to respect cultural protocols and community rhythms. Engaging in decolonial practices with knowledge holders

– supporting their understanding of the research process, fostering critical participation, and enabling them to reclaim authority over narratives – is essential. Documentation should preserve nuance and cultural meaning through verbatim transcripts, contextual commentary, and interpretive notes that situate knowledge within its historical and cultural framework. These commitments are not merely methodological preferences but rather reflect Reviere's (2001) five canons of trustworthiness in Afrocentric research.

By integrating these recommendations, future research can produce scholarship that is rigorous, ethically responsible, and socially meaningful. Such research will not only advance academic understanding but will also empower communities, strengthen Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and support their relevance and continuity within Edendale and other African contexts.

9.8 Final Reflection

This study affirms that Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Edendale were neither erased nor forgotten, despite centuries of disruption, reshaping, and reinterpretation under colonial and missionary interventions. The research demonstrates that these knowledge systems have persisted through the resilience of community memory, oral traditions, and lived practice. Through the voices of elders in the oral history interviews, the embodied insights revealed in the Transect Walk, and the reflective narratives captured using the River of Life methodology, the Indigenous wisdom of those who originally inhabited the broader Edendale area continues to resonate with clarity, depth, and dignity, revealing both continuity and adaptation over time. This study, therefore, repositions Edendale's history beyond the colonial moment of land allocation to Pretorius, foregrounding it instead as part of a longer Indigenous landscape of governance, learning, and relational knowledge that endured displacement and later re-emerged through processes of reclamation and epistemic continuity.

The restoration and revitalisation of Indigenous knowledge in Edendale requires deliberate engagement with the Afrocentric principle of learning, unlearning, and relearning. Learning refers to the historical and psychological process through which African subjects internalised colonial and missionary epistemic frameworks, coming to regard Western knowledge, literacy, and Christian morality as markers of progress and Indigenous practices as backward or shameful. This was not a neutral acquisition but an imposed epistemic condition that disrupted ancestral modes of knowing. Unlearning is the critical deconstruction of these

internalised hierarchies, the conscious recognition that African knowledge was not inherently inferior but delegitimised through structures of power. It involves emotional and intellectual work to dismantle shame, question assumed truths, and expose the mechanisms of epistemicide. Relearning is the active, creative reconstruction of African epistemologies for contemporary life, not as a return to a pristine past, but as adaptive, contextually grounded reclamation. It integrates ancestral wisdom with present realities, restoring indigenous cognition without rejecting all external influence.

This process of restoration is both an academic and a community endeavour. It represents collective healing, cultural reclamation, and empowerment, highlighting the interdependence of research and community engagement. By centring Afrocentric values and participatory methodologies, the study not only documents Indigenous knowledge but also contributes to its revival, enabling the community to reclaim authority over its histories, practices, and intellectual heritage. Ultimately, this work ensures that Edendale's Indigenous knowledge continues to inform a future that is self-determined, resilient, and culturally grounded, bridging past wisdom with contemporary life and fostering intergenerational continuity.

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Appendix 1: Oral History Interviews

Research Instrument

The following specific questions will guide the data generation strategy of this research.

Interview 1: Biographical information & Personal history – My Story, My Roots

Main Question

Can you tell me about your childhood experiences of life in Edendale, what was life like at home and in the community?

Follow-Up Questions:

1. What are some of the memories that stand out for you while you were growing up? (You may begin from the earliest experiences in your childhood up until now)
2. Did your family or community have special ways of doing things every day?
3. How did your elders or parents, back then, teach you what is right and wrong?
4. Were there songs, sayings, or stories you were told as a child?
5. How did people treat nature, animals, or spiritual things in your early years?
6. What kind of support did people give to each other in your community?
7. Was your family part of a clan or totem group? What did that mean to you?
8. What were the important things you learned from home, not from school?
9. Were there times when what you learnt at school felt different from what you learnt at home?
10. What do you think today's children should learn from the way you were raised?

Interview 2: Edendale History – Our Story, Our Community

Main Question

Can you share what you know about how Edendale began and how life was in the early days? (Including what you learnt from folklores and traditional stories)

Follow-Up Questions:

1. Who were the first people to come and live in Edendale?
2. How did people live, learn, and work together in those early days?
3. Did the early families bring their own traditions with them?
4. How did churches, schools, or new rules change the way people lived?
5. Were there old customs or traditions that people stopped doing because of these changes?
6. Were people ever told to leave behind their African ways or to forget them?
7. How do you think these changes have affected life in Edendale today?
8. Are there old traditions that people are trying to bring back or still practice today?
9. What can young people learn from the way things were done long ago?
10. What parts of the old way of living and learning should we remember and keep?

Interview 3: Indigenous Knowledge Systems – The Knowledge We Carry

Main Question

Let's talk about how people in Edendale use to learn, teach, and pass on knowledge before all the changes.

Follow-Up Questions:

1. Before schools and churches came in, how did people learn important things?
2. What kind of knowledge or skills did people pass on through family or the community?
3. Who were the people that were trusted to give advice or teach life lessons?
4. What African traditions did people try to hold on to, even when changes came?
5. When the Westerners came in with churches, schools, land ownership and medicine, how did that affect local knowledge?
6. Are there traditional skills or wisdom that fewer people know today?
7. How has Western medicine changed the way people think about traditional healing?
8. Did learning science or religion in school make people question what elders taught?
9. Are elders still respected as teachers in the same way as before?
10. Have storytelling, observation, and hands-on learning faded, or do they still exist and hold the same value?

11. How has the connection to land or spiritual places changed over time?
12. Has learning other language affected how people understand traditional ways?
13. Are there things that used to be passed down from generation to generation that are now forgotten?
14. What have we lost or gained by mixing traditional and Western knowledge?
15. Why do you think it's important (or not) to keep our traditional ways of learning and living?

Appendix 2: Transect Walk

Participants: Knowledge holders with insights into the historical, social, and cultural significance of Edendale's key sites.

Research Team:

Principal Investigator/Researcher

3 Facilitators from EHP Research Team

Sinomlando member for psycho-social support.

Photographer/videographer for visual documentation?

Duration:

Four-hour participatory activity followed by a two-hour reflection session.

Materials:

Field notebooks, audio recorders, cameras, maps, and markers for annotation.

Purpose of the Transect Walk

To document the spatial and cultural dimensions of Edendale's historical narrative.
Uncover how colonial influences disrupted Indigenous practices and knowledge systems.

Highlight community resilience and adaptation strategies over time.

Triangulate findings with data from the RoL sessions, oral histories, and archival research

Structure of the Transect Walk

Preparation and Route Selection (30 minutes)

Routes are chosen collaboratively with knowledge holders to include sites of historical, cultural, and social importance, such as:

Spaces symbolising the introduction of Western education.

Areas associated with cultural resistance or adaptation.

Key landmarks for Indigenous practices.

Guided Walk and Reflection (3 hours)

Co-researchers guide the walk, sharing narratives and interpretations at each site.

Facilitators encourage critical reflection through open-ended questions:

How did this site contribute to cultural preservation or adaptation?

What changes occurred here due to colonial or Western influences?

How do these changes relate to current community practices?

Researchers document observations, take photographs, and record participant insights.

Post-Walk Discussion and Analysis (2 hours)

Discussion Topics:

Knowledge holders connect spatial narratives to broader themes of resilience, disruption, and adaptation.

Exploration of how these narratives align with or expand findings from the RoL workshop.

Outcome:

A synthesized understanding of Edendale's historical and spatial narrative, emphasizing the community's agency and resilience

Appendix 3: River of Life workshop

Participants:

Knowledge holders from the Edendale community with deep historical understanding.

Research Team:

Principal Investigator/Researcher.

Three scribes for note-taking and synthesis.

Sinomlando member for psycho-social support.

Duration:

Six-hour participatory workshop.

Materials:

Flip charts, markers, colored paper, pens, and visual aids for creating rivers.

Purpose of the RoL Workshop

To create visual representations of Edendale's historical narrative using the river metaphor.

Facilitate dialogue about the impacts of Western education and knowledge systems on African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS).

Promote learning, unlearning, and relearning within the community.

Uncover and address gaps in the collective memory, enriching findings from prior oral histories and document analysis.

Answer the study's key research questions regarding the interplay between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems and the community's resilience.

Workshop Structure and Activities

4. Introduction and Overview (30 minutes)

Welcome and introductions: Research team and knowledge holders.

Overview of the study objectives and the role of the River of Life in addressing research questions.

Explanation of the river metaphor in African storytelling traditions.

Establishing comfort rules for engagement

Group-Based Individual River of Life Creation (1 hour) Activity Purpose: Explore Research Question

Process:

Knowledge holders are divided into small groups to develop a group-based River of Life collaboratively.

Instructions for knowledge holders:

Share individual knowledge and experiences of Edendale's history within the group.

Discuss and identify key events (social, political, economic, or environmental) that have shaped the community's journey.

Use the metaphor of a river to visually represent the group's collective understanding:

- Positive events (e.g., cultural preservation, resilience) go on the right side of the river.
- Negative events (e.g., disruptions, challenges) go on the left side.

Use bends for turning points, rapids for challenges, and tributaries for external influences.

Annotate the timeline with brief descriptions of each event and its significance.

Each group finalises a single group-based River of Life.

2. Group Work/Plenary: Toward a Single Collective River of Life. Collective memory to collective histories (2 hours)

Activity Purpose: Address Research Question 2 by synthesizing the group-based rivers into a single collective narrative.

Process: Groups present their collective River of Life to the larger group.

Facilitators guide a plenary discussion to identify overlaps, key themes, and chronological patterns across the group-based rivers.

Knowledge holders collaboratively synthesise a single collective River of Life that incorporates shared events, critical turning points, and unique perspectives from each group.

3. Collective Reflection: Learning and Relearning (2 hours)

Activity Purpose: Address Research Questions 2 and 3 through critical reflection and discussion.

Discussion Prompts:

Glaring Gaps:

What aspects of Edendale's history are missing?

Why do these gaps exist?

Twists and Turns:

What caused the major transitions and disruptions?

How did the community respond to these challenges?

Pushes and Pulls:

What external forces influenced Edendale's journey (e.g., colonialism, policies)?

What internal strengths allowed the community to navigate these forces?

Researcher's Role:

Provide additional historical insights to address gaps in the collective River of Life.

4. Conclusions (30 minutes)

Focus Questions:

What are the key individual and collective lessons learned from this exercise?

How do these lessons inform the community's current identity and strategies for the future?

Facilitators lead a final discussion to document knowledge holders' reflections on their learning and their implication for preserving and strengthening African Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Edendale.

Expected Outcomes:

Group-based Rivers of Life reflecting shared individual experiences.

A single collective River of Life that maps Edendale's historical narrative comprehensively.

Insights into how external and internal dynamics have shaped the community's knowledge systems.

A deeper understanding of lessons that can inform resilience and identity-building for the present and future.

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Letter



COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
School of Education

Informed Consent Document

Dear Participant,

My name is **Joy Ojochogwu Obaje.** I am a doctoral student studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, with the student number **(214583048).** The title of my research is: **"An Afrocentric exploration of Western Knowledge System over the African Indigenous Knowledge Systems: The Case Study of the African community in Edendale".** The study aims to explore the Western Knowledge system in relation to African Indigenous Knowledge Systems from an Afrocentric standpoint. I am interested in interviewing you to learn about your experiences and observations on the subject.

May I formally invite you to participate in this study, in the form of an interview?

- Oral **history sessions** are conducted in three stages, where you will share your life experiences, memories, and knowledge related to the community and its history.

- A **River of Life activity**, where you will reflect on and illustrate significant moments, changes, and turning points in your personal or community history.

- A **Transect walk**, where we will walk through parts of the community together, and you will share stories, memories, and meanings attached to particular places.

The information you provide in this interview will be used for scholarly research purposes only. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may choose to participate, decline, or stop the interview at any time without any penalty. Your responses will be anonymous; your name will not appear in any part of the study. The interview recording and any related materials will be stored in a protected file accessible only to me, my supervisor(s), and the research team. In accordance with the University of KwaZulu-Natal's guidelines, all materials will be securely disposed of after five years by shredding and burning.

If you agree to participate, please sign the declaration attached to this statement

I can be contacted at: School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg. Email: 214583048@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Cell number: (+27) [redacted]

My supervisor is **Dr Zamo Hlela,** who is located at the School of Education, Pietermaritzburg Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Contact details: email: hlelaz@ukzn.ac.za. Phone number: (+27) [redacted]

For any ethical concerns or queries, you can also reach out to the College of Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration at the Research Office, Westville Campus, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Tel: 27 31 2604557, Fax: 27 31 2604609, Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Kind regards

Joy Ojochogwu Obaje

DECLARATION

I…… *(full names of participant*) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.

I consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded (if applicable)

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT DATE

……